

## Things left unsaid by earnevst

**Category:** IT (2019), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Angst with a Happy Ending, Beverly Marsh & Richie Tozier Are Best Friends, Christmas, Eddie Kaspbrak Lives, Eddie Kaspbrak Loves Richie Tozier, Fix-It, Fluff and Angst, Fluff and Humor, Gay Eddie Kaspbrak, Gay Richie Tozier, Hurt/Comfort, Idiots in Love, Love Confessions, M/M, Movie: IT Chapter Two (2019), Mutual Pining, Pining, Repression, Richie Tozier Loves Eddie Kaspbrak, Slow Burn, going on dates that aren't actually dates but they are dates, it's really soft and funny too doe, richie is a bottom i won't take criticism, richie is a little shit but eddie still loves him

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak, Richie Tozier, The Losers Club (IT)

**Relationships:** Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-11-05

**Updated:** 2019-12-08

**Packaged:** 2019-12-16 18:42:58

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 6

**Words:** 22,341

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

After murdering a killer space clown, it was hard parting ways with Eddie for Richie. He had just gotten him back, but he wasn't gonna beg him not to leave. Eddie has a wife back home, Richie has to understand that.

And so Richie goes back to comedy and Eddie goes back to New York. Richie thinks he's finally getting himself together until months later he finds Eddie sat front row at his show.

## 1. See you later

### Author's Note:

i'll try to update this as frequently as i can. i already know what i want to do with it in my mind, so i hope you enjoy reading this!

It was finally over. They killed that piece of shit clown. It turns out bullying sometimes *does* work. And now it was time to find out what happens next.

All of them were leaving in the morning. Mike was going to Florida. Bill was going back home, Ben and Beverly were probably going to go on some vacation, Eddie's gonna head back to New York.

And Richie's going to...

Richie doesn't know what the fuck he's gonna do.

He had gotten in bed hours ago, but he can't bring himself to sleep. Richie rubbed his eyes and continued looking at the ceiling, lost in his thoughts.

Out of all nights, this is the one he can't fucking sleep. And what was keeping him up was torture, it was dancing in his head as if it was taunting him.

*You're in love with Eddie Kaspbrak.*

It is repeating itself over and over.

"Fuck off..."

Richie groaned and ran his hands over his face. He had only remembered he grew up in this hellhole two days ago, and on top of that, remembering he still has feelings for the boy that talked faster than he could blink...Was just a lot to handle.

He swung his feet over the bed and stood up. He grabbed his glasses from the nightstand and walked out of his room. As he stepped out of

the hallway, he noticed the light in Eddie's room was on.

He furrowed his eyebrows in confusion and walked towards Eddie's room. He was going to put his head closer to the door but was caught off guard when the door suddenly swung open.

Richie blinked a few times, his eyes getting used to the bright light shining behind Eddie.

Richie's eyes drifted to Eddie's bed. He had three different books open on it.

When Richie brought his eyes back to Eddie, Eddie was still looking at him, but instead, his eyebrows were furrowed, and his mouth had formed into a line.

"What are you doing awake?"

They both asked in unison.

"You answer first."

They said again in unison.

Eddie rolled his eyes, and Richie fought back a chuckle.

"You're the one standing at my door, asshole, you go first!"

"You're the one that still has the lights turned on in your room at what,"

Richie moved his head aside to look at the clock behind Eddie

"Almost four in the damn morning!"

Eddie sighed and crossed his arms.

"Fine, I couldn't sleep. I re-packed both of my suitcases twice and started to read. How about you?"

Richie scratched the back of his neck and shrugged.

"I couldn't sleep either. But instead of whatever you were doing, I was

just laying in my bed the whole time."

It got quiet, and Eddie coughed to break the silence.

"So, what were you doing at my door?"

Richie froze for a second like he had been caught doing something he shouldn't, but then he remembered he actually has a good reason.

"Your lights were on, was I not supposed to investigate?"

Eddie laughed lightly at that, Richie couldn't help but smile.

He's always loved making Eddie laugh. Each time it feels like an accomplishment.

"Yeah, I guess that's kinda weird."

Eddie smiled up at him, and Richie's breath shook for a moment.

"Now, could you get out of the way? I'd like to go get some water."

"Oh, sure."

Richie moved to the side, and Eddie walked down the hall.

"Goodnight!"

Richie shouted, but Eddie turned around quickly to shush him. He forgot other people were already asleep.

He heard Eddie say something while he continued walking, probably goodnight as well.

He then stood there awkwardly, realizing he walked out of his room for the same reason.

Richie didn't really want to run into Eddie again, so he figured he's not *that* thirsty and can drink in the morning.

---

"Goodbye, Mike!"

They all yelled and waved goodbye as he drove off. Mike honked two times, saying bye as well, making the others smile.

"It's good that he's the first to leave. After all, he's the one that never left this shithole."

Richie said, noticing how Mike's car had now disappeared.

"Yeah, I hope he has a wonderful time in Florida,"

Beverly said while smiling and clutching at Ben's arm, leaning her head against his arm.

Richie saw Ben kiss her forehead, and his eyes drifted to Eddie. He was still staring at the road, a small frown on his face. He looked tired.

"We better get going as well. There's a yacht waiting for us."

Ben said and held hands with Bev.

"A fucking yacht? Well, aren't you two already living the life."

Eddie said, making Ben and Beverly laugh.

Bill walked up to Ben, and they were already talking about something.

He overheard Ben tell Bill to learn how to write endings for books.

Beverly walked up to Richie and lightly rubbed his arm up and down to get his attention.

He jumped a little and turned to look at Bev.

"You were zoning out."

"Thinking about stuff."

"Yeah, I can tell."

They smiled at each other, but it didn't take long for Richie's smile to turn back into a frown.

"You can call me anytime, you know? I care about you, Rich. I can already tell something is bothering you, we'll talk about it later, okay?"

Richie nodded, and Beverly pulled him into a hug.

"I love you."

Richie chuckled, as a tear slid down his left cheek, he hadn't even noticed his eyes had filled with tears that quickly.

He held onto her tighter.

"I love you too, Bev."

Eddie and Bill said goodbye to them as well. And they both walked off hand in hand.

Bill pulled out his phone to check the time and nearly dropped it.

"Oh, shit! I have a flight to catch."

"How do you forget something like that?"

Eddie asked, while Bill quickly checked if he had everything.

"I didn't forget, you bunch *made* me forget. I guess I'll just miss this y'know?"

"I'm sure we'll see each other again soon,"

Richie said, trying to be a bit optimistic.

"As long as the place Isn't Derry, I'm up to it."

He added, and that made both Bill and Eddie laugh.

Bill shook Eddie's and Richie's hand, saying his goodbyes and running

off.

Eddie and Richie stood there, realizing they were the only two left.

"...And then there were two."

Richie said quietly, and they both laughed awkwardly.

Eddie was looking at him, and there was something sad in his eyes. Something Richie couldn't crack.

"I guess it's time for *us* to say bye now,"

Eddie said, and Richie bit his lip, nodding slowly. He was nervous.

It feels like they're teenagers again, and Eddie's going off to college.

Richie regretted his goodbye to him back then, and he sure as hell doesn't want to regret this one too.

But that's hard when the perfect goodbye for him isn't a goodbye at all.

It's a *"How about we just drive off somewhere far away together?"*

And maybe if he had the courage a *"Hey, I've loved you since we were kids. Wanna get married?"*

But in reality, Eddie has a wife. He *has* to go home. Richie has to understand that.

Richie never said a word those twenty-seven years. It turns out, he might not say anything this time either.

All the little time that had been given back to them, gone to waste.

"I'm gonna miss you, Eds,"

Richie said, and Eddie sighed.

"Don't call me that, you dick."

He replied, and Richie laughed.

"But don't be like that. We'll see each other again. This *can't* be goodbye."

Eddie said, and Richie looked at him, still trying to understand what was the look in his eyes.

"How about see you later, then?"

Richie suggested, and Eddie chuckled.

That might be the last time Richie sees and hears Eddie look this beautiful in weeks.

What if months, even years? Those thoughts made something twist in Richie's stomach.

"See you later sounds really good."

Richie smiled.

Another wave of silence passed over them like the one last night. This time it was Richie that broke it

"If I'm honest, this fucking sucks."

They both laughed, and he could hear Eddie say "*It does*" in between laughs.

Their laughter died down, and it was time to part now.

The thought of asking Eddie to actually re-consider and leave with him crossed Richie's mind.

He wanted to leave Derry with Eddie by his side, but maybe it's too late. Maybe Richie's too scared.

Something went wrong in Richie's brain, and he stuck out his hand for Eddie to shake as a goodbye.

Eddie's eyes went from his hand to back up at him a couple of times before he laughed.

"You fucking serious? Get in here, idiot."



Eddie said and pulled Richie in for a hug.

Richie's arms wrapping around him immediately.

He hooked his head on Eddie's shoulder. He could feel Eddie's nose in the crook of his neck.

They held onto each other like that for a minute or two.

It felt like forever, Richie wouldn't mind forever.

And again like a taunt,

*You're in love with Eddie Kaspbrak.*

Made it's way back into his mind right at this moment.

That made Richie's arms loosen, and they both pulled away from the hug.

Eddie smiled at him and started walking back to his car

"See you later, trashmouth."

"See you later, spaghetti."

And before he knew it, Eddie was in his car and gone.

For who knows how long.

## 2. Long time, no (shitty jokes) see

The next six months of Richie's life weren't as different as the life he had before he returned to Derry.

On days when he wasn't hosting his show, he spent at home.

Waking up at two or three in the afternoon, watching whatever was on the TV and eating whatever food he still had in the fridge.

He'd also talk to Beverly about once a week or two. She'd complain about how he *needs* to leave his apartment and start taking care of himself better.

To which Richie would reply: *"If you want me to start working out and eating salads for every meal...It's going to take a lot more than that."*

Because to Richie, he saw no problem in the way he lived.

He's lonely, there's no doubt in that, but he's been alone for years.

He's used to the quiet rooms and empty bed he sleeps in.

Also, he *loves* having his bed all to himself — no one to steal his covers or shove him away when he moves too much in his sleep.

But then there's a part of him that *yearns* for someone to hold onto in the night.

To have someone still be by his side in the morning that he could wake up with a kiss.

He tries his best to not think about Eddie as that someone.

Suddenly the sound of people shouting and cars honking outside seemed to wake Richie up.

He tossed around and reached for his glasses, slipping them on and reaching for his phone.

"Damn it,"

Richie whispered when he noticed he hadn't plugged in the charger all the way before he went to sleep.

He turned it on and immediately sat up when he saw it was 3:42 PM, and he had missed six calls from his manager.

"Oh fuck, okay, shit, shit, shit-"

He jumped out of bed, his right leg tangling in the covers, making him almost trip. He kicked the covers off and ran across the room to get some clothes.

He called his manager while simultaneously jumping into his pair of black jeans. He probably needed to throw them out.

He has built on a little bit of a tummy through these months, so he had to try a little harder to zip them all the way up.

The line finally picked up, and Richie inhaled sharply

"Richie, what the actual fuck!?"

His manager's voice shouted through the phone, and he nearly dropped it.

"I must've forgotten to turn on my alarm last night! I thought-"

"You have a show in four hours and the place you're hosting is a three and half hour drive!"

Richie sighed, putting the phone on speaker and throwing it on the bed as he put on a shirt.

"You should've been here by now running over your shit!"

"Alright! Alright, I hear you! I'll make it in two if there's not too much traffic."

He shouted and grabbed his phone, running to the bathroom.

"You're already in deep shit as it is! Your shows might not be doing that bad, but you look fucking terrible,"

Richie scoffed "Gee, thanks" he said as he brushed his teeth.

"And you've been almost late to too many of your shows."

Richie spat out the toothpaste in the sink and splashed some water on his face.

"You gotta get your shit together, man."

Richie rolled his eyes "Yeah, like I can't tell."

"No, I don't think you do."

His manager said quietly and sighed.

Richie almost felt bad because he can admit he's been acting like an asshole for weeks, and it was frustrating for both himself *and* his manager.

"Listen, how about we get some Mcdonalds? Meet me t-"

"There's no fucking time! I'll get you a burger and something to drink. I need you here as quickly as possible."

Richie was about to leave his apartment but realized he was about to drive for like three hours, and he had just woken up like fifteen minutes ago.

"Fine, see you. Now shut up and hang up! I need to piss."

He couldn't make out what his manager had exactly said before he hung up, but he knew it was something along the lines of "*Fucking idiot*".

---

To Richie's luck, he had made it to his show in precisely three hours and twelve minutes. So thankfully, that gave him enough time to rehearse his jokes in his room and put on a proper suit.

His manager had even sent in a stylist to fix up his hair because Richie hadn't noticed the top of his head looked like a bird's nest.

He was looking at his lines and grimaced at some of them. Sometimes he thought that him writing his own material would even be better than this.

"What the fuck is this one-

He showed the page to the stylist behind him but didn't hold it up long enough for her to read it.

"The way I got to hook up with my girlfriend was by saying '*I don't know your name yet, but it must be Wi-Fi because I am feeling such a strong connection here.*'"

Richie threw the papers on the table in front of him and scoffed.

"An '*I fucked your mom*' joke is a million times better than that shit."

He whispered and thanked his stylist once she had finished doing his hair.

Even after all these months, the girlfriend jokes hadn't disappeared. Portraying himself as straight is something Richie's been (*in his own opinion*) quite good at. Considering he's been in the closet to this day and has only had a few one night stands with men, that he had regretted having after.

"Richie, you're up in three minutes."

A woman peeked into his room to say, and he nodded. Running his hands over his face and letting out a long sigh.

"C'mon...You got this. They love you out there."

He whispered, trying to reassure himself and stood up, reaching for his bourbon and taking a swig. He wiped his mouth and made his way out of his room, power-walking down the hall.

"Alright, Richie. Listen-

His manager appeared out of nowhere, and Richie nearly scared himself to death

"Fuck- Don't pull that shit!"

"You're telling that to *me*? Anyways, you have it covered. You forget something? Improvise."

Richie stood behind the curtain, glaring at the microphone, his hands were slightly shaking.

"Just don't humiliate yourself."

His manager patted his shoulder. Richie nodded and took a deep breath.

"Thanks, I'll try to fucking not to."

He whispered and put on a smile as he started walking towards the stage. The speakers introduced him as Richie Tozier. He waved at the audience as they cheered and some even whistled. He thanked them for coming and wrapped his hands around the microphone, swaying it slightly

"So, I was in the shop looking for a jacket to buy my girlfriend as a present."

Richie took the microphone off the stand, so he could walk around the stage and have more movement with his hands. Because he was the type of person to talk with his hands, and It'd look really stupid, but he couldn't care less.

"I couldn't decide which one to get, so I asked the salesman, *'If you were buying a jacket for your girlfriend, which one would you get?'*"

To his surprise, the audience erupted with laughter. He smiled and adjusted his glasses. "I mean c'mon!" Richie continued, "If I buy something she doesn't like, she'll wear it once to be nice, and then It'll never be seen again." The audience laughed again, and Richie mentally high-fived himself. Each time they laughed, it felt so much easier to make jokes and not worry that much.

"And oh, boy...If she likes it-" He pouted and did a thumbs up, "I might've just won the lottery if that happens!"

Richie scanned the audience, smiling at the laughing faces.

But then he saw a familiar face in the front, and he froze.

Eddie Kaspbrak was sitting there with his arms crossed, smiling softly.

Richie felt like he couldn't breathe, their eyes were locked, and it didn't seem like either of them were breathing.

The laughter had finally died down, and it hit Richie that he actually has people to entertain. Richie laughed nervously quietly and blinked a few times, looking away from Eddie. He could still feel Eddie's eyes on him. He didn't have to actually look at Eddie to know what he looked like right now. Probably, with his eyebrows furrowed in disappointment but a soft smirk that said, *"I cannot stand him."*

"Woah, zoned out there for a bit," Richie said, his voice was a little shaky.

"I was just thinking about the time my girlfriend and I, a few days before Valentine's day had watched the lion king together."

He almost stuttered on the word girlfriend. It felt different, knowing that Eddie was listening and watching him like a hawk right now. Thinking about how horrible his jokes are, and how he most definitely doesn't actually have a girlfriend. Eddie always saw right through him.

"So for Valentine's day, I sent flowers and a card to her sister on accident."

Richie put his hand on his hip and shook his head, making some of the audience giggle. "Wanna know what the card said?" He cleared his throat and spoke in a *'swooning'* type of voice

*"My dear... Don't tell your sister about this, but I'm glad I chose the right one. Also, I can see sex written in the stars. Can you feel the love tonight?"*

The audience laughed, and relief washed over Richie. The worry he had in his eyes disappeared pretty quick.

"And I had no idea! I just could *not* have worded that any worse."

The audience continued to laugh. He glanced at Eddie, who was now rubbing his eyes and shaking his head.

Richie smiled.

---

The show had ended, and Richie thanked the audience for being fantastic, took a final bow, and walked off-stage behind the curtains. His manager was immediately right by his side and patting his back.

"Good job, my man! You were great! I mean, you slipped up a few times, but overall you were great tonight."

Richie smiled and froze. His hands were shaking again.

"I saw an old friend in the audience."

He said, and the manager stopped walking. He didn't say anything, expecting Richie to continue

"Oh, uhm. Could you like get him? Like, ask if he wants to come backstage?"

Richie smiled awkwardly and squinted his eyes, hoping he'd agree. His manager hesitated but slowly nodded.

"Fine, what do they look like?"

"Yes!" Richie jumped in the air from happiness.

He realized that might've been a bit of an overreaction. He coughed and tried to collect himself.

"He has short brown hair and brown eyes. He's short, and he's



wearing this uhm- Dark...Blue shirt? I think? Not sure, couldn't really tell. And he has a tie."

The manager nodded and started walking past Richie to get Eddie.

"Oh, and he also has nice cheekbones and a great smile!"

"Those weren't really necessary!"

Richie turned around and bolted to his room, with a million questions in his mind.

What was Eddie doing here? *Why* was Eddie here? He's always hated Richie's jokes. This would've been like torture. Did he come alone?

Richie shivered as he remembered Eddie's married.

Eddie's married to a woman.

Was she with him? Were they still together? Maybe Eddie's already driving off with her in the passenger's seat.

Richie ran towards his mirror and patted down his shirt, ran his hands through his hair, and adjusted his glasses.

He saw the door open in the mirror and was met with the familiar face he saw in the audience earlier.

Richie turned to face him and couldn't help but smile.

"Here for an autograph?"

Eddie scoffed and turned his head, but Richie could see he was trying to hide his smile.

"Oh, fuck off."

Eddie looked back at him, and they just stared at each other. Eddie looked Richie up and down, and Richie did the same with him.

"You look like the fucking joker."

Richie genuinely did not expect that and gasped, trying not to laugh.

Eddie continued, "A red suit and a dark green tie? What are you? A tomato?"

Eddie looked at him with a straight face, but it wasn't long before they both broke into laughter.

Richie was pretty much howling with laughter. "What the fuck?"

Eddie was covering his face with his hands and shaking his head, "I don't fucking know!"

"That's one way to meet someone after months of not seeing each other!"

After Richie said that they stopped laughing, and instead Eddie frowned a little.

"Yeah, about that I'm sorry I was really busy-"

"No, no It's all good!"

Richie lied and continued,

"I get it. I had tons of work to do."

He put on a smile, and Eddie looked at him sadly.

Richie smirked, "Your mom is just so much work, y'know?"

Eddie glared at him "You serious, dude?"

"Very." Richie smiled, and Eddie came up to him to punch him lightly in the chest, "Asshole."

Eddie insulted him, but it had no real burn behind it. Their eyes had met again, and the expression on Richie's face was so fond, Eddie couldn't help but smile.

"I'll answer it right away. I'm here because I just needed a break."

Eddie shrugged and scratched his chin. "From work and..." He hesitated for a moment, "Yeah, from work mostly."

He laughed nervously, and Richie nodded. "I get it."

Richie's hands felt like they were on fire, burning, and longing to put themselves on, Eddie. To just hold him and feel the way his chest moved with his breaths. So he put them in his pockets.

"I actually need to sign some real autographs, though."

Richie said, and Eddie rolled his eyes "I still can't believe people find you funny and pay money to see this shit."

"Oh, don't lie. I saw you laugh a few times!" Eddie looked at Richie like he was offended, "Me? Laughing at a joke *you* made? You're hallucinating, pal."

Richie snickered, "Whatever you say, spaghetti man." Eddie crossed his arms and glared at Richie.

Richie then noticed that Eddie was carrying some muscle now, his arms were bigger, his dark blue shirt tight against his skin. *Fuck, did he have to get any hotter?*

"Listen, how about you wait here while I go quickly sign some autographs?"

Eddie raised one of his eyebrows, his mouth was in a line, and Richie would be lying if he said he didn't find *that* hot as well.

Richie pointed at one of the cupboards, "That one has snacks in it. Treat yourself with whatever you like. I'll be back in a few."

"Why do I need to wait again?"

"I'm gonna come back here to get you, and we're gonna go out to eat."

Eddie smiled, "Oh, are we?"

"I haven't seen you in forever! We're definitely hanging out."

Eddie sighed and shrugged, going over to the snack cupboard and pulling out some kind of chocolate bar, biting down into it.

"Don't be too long, dickhead."

Richie was almost out the door, but he stopped for a second to wink at Eddie and give him a thumbs up.

### 3. Pastries and beer

The bar they decided on isn't anything expensive or cool-looking. It does, however, have a slight western vibe. It's not too packed, and the music isn't that loud either. Richie commented that It's almost perfect, which made Eddie laugh.

"I'll have one beer, and he'll have-

"I can pay for my own drink."

Eddie interrupted, and Richie squinted his eyes, "You sure?"

"Yes, dickhead." He glared at Richie before turning his head back and continuing,

"I'll have one beer too."

The bartender nodded and reached for two bottles of beer, opening them up and sliding them across the table.

"Paying for that beer could've been my treat. You already paid to see my show."

Richie said with a small pout on his face. Eddie drank from the beer and looked at Richie,

"I have a good amount of money that I earn by actually having a job. Not by making horrible jokes in front of an audience with no sense of humor."

Richie gasped and put his hand on his heart, acting hurt. Eddie was using all his strength not to crack a smile.

"*Ouch*, Eds..." Richie shook his head and let his hand fall from his chest, "Having a job sounds exhausting."

Eddie shut his eyes, and his mouth formed into a line. His face expression was saying, '*Here we fucking go.*'

"I'm so sorry to hear you haven't had a single second of fun in the

place you work."

Richie placed his hand on Eddie's shoulder and shook him a bit to "comfort" him.

"I can't imagine going to work in a place so boring and plain. You're so strong."

Of course, Richie was still joking around, but he actually meant the '*you're so strong*' part, because Eddie really *is* strong.

Eddie's the bravest and strongest person with a golden heart he's ever met.

Eddie shook off Richie's hand off of his shoulder and glared at him again,

"You and the people that actually see your show still have no sense of humor."

"My horrible jokes pay the rent, though."

Richie paused to take a drink from his beer and then fully turned his body on the stool to be facing Eddie,

"And I *know* you think I'm funny."

Eddie almost choked on his beer and wiped his mouth before bursting out a laugh.

"Now that's a funny joke! Tell another one."

"I know my jokes have made you giggle and smile,"

"Nope, no, not at all."

"You can tell me, c'mon, spaghetti."

"There's nothing *to* tell your jokes have never been funny."

"I know I've made you do that little nose laugh where you just let the air out of your nose."

Richie was smiling. He knew he was pushing Eddie to the edge because he could see Eddie biting his lip to try and not smile to prove Richie's point.

"My jokes are funny. You just don't want to admit it."

Eddie turned on the stool to face Richie, and their knees bumped together while doing so. Making Richie's eyes dart to them for a second, and his cheeks heat up a tiny bit.

Richie took a drink of his beer and wiggled his eyebrows at Eddie, feeling confident in knowing there's *no way* Eddie has never laughed at a joke of his.

Even as kids, Eddie always acted annoyed or either disgusted by Richie's jokes. But when Eddie would turn his head away or cover his mouth with his hand to scratch his nose, Richie would sometimes catch Eddie smiling or quietly giggling. When that would happen, Richie would come home and throw his fist up in the air from his big victory.

Richie remembers how those moments made him feel. His heartbeat would speed up, and he wouldn't stop thinking about how he made Eddie, the asthmatic boy that talked way too fast for his own good, giggle or smile, he'd think about it for *days*.

Richie tightened his grip on the beer bottle, now feeling a bit nervous, because of him thinking about how he's had a crush on the man in front of him since he was twelve.

Eddie squinted slightly and smirked a little bit. He motioned with his hand for Richie to lean in closer, to which he hesitated for only a second before doing so.

Richie feels kinda lightheaded, is he holding his breath? He has no idea. He just knows Eddie's face is too close to his. And If Eddie doesn't do anything soon, he might go insane right in this bar from how badly he's holding himself back from just crashing his lips against the hypochondriac's in front of him.

To Richie's luck, Eddie finally opened up his mouth to speak,

"The day I laugh at one of your jokes, Rich,"

Eddie paused for a second, "Is the day the world ends. You got that?"

Richie chuckled, "Damn, the world is ending so soon? There are so many things I haven't done yet."

Eddie rolled his eyes, not bothering to think of a reply to that. Eddie finally leaned back and turned back to the bar table and took another drink. Richie felt like he could breathe again and took a sip as well.

Things turned oddly quiet for about a minute after that. Richie was tapping his almost empty beer bottle, and Eddie was looking at something out of the window.

"So how's your girlfriend?"

Eddie casually asked. Richie's tapping stopped, and his eyes widened, meanwhile, Eddie was still looking out of the window.

"My-" Richie swallowed the lump in his throat, "My girlfriend?"

Eddie turned to look at Richie and nodded. Richie chuckled awkwardly for a second and scratched his stubble.

*Ah, shit. Right. I portray myself as straight with a girlfriend on my show. Forgot about that.*

"Well, she's kinda..."

Richie doesn't know if he should just tell Eddie she's not real.

Tell Eddie that It's just a defense mechanism because he's afraid of being exposed. It's all just a construction he's made to hide.

He's learned that It's better to be someone you're not and be safe, rather than be yourself and live in fear.

Or maybe Richie should go along with it and tell Eddie he *does* have a girlfriend that he's *not* lonely and has someone to come home to.

*Fuck it. Having an imaginary girlfriend is too hard.*



"She doesn't exist."

Eddie looked at him in confusion, "Fuck, dude. That's rough."

"No, I meant that as in she *literally* does not exist."

Eddie's facial expression didn't change for a few seconds, but then the realization hit, and he let out a quiet "Oh..."

Richie chugged down the rest of his beer and motioned the bartender for another. Richie decided to break the awkward silence,

"Aren't you gonna make fun of me? Or say It's weird?"

"Why would I do either of those things?"

Eddie's voice was calm and honest. Richie's expression softened, "I don't know."

"The situations you and your now confirmed imaginary girlfriend had always seemed too bizarre to be real for me anyway. I mean today's Valentine's joke?"

Both of them started laughing, "Like what the fuck, Rich? That was the worst thing I ever heard!" They continued to laugh, Richie wasn't nervous anymore. Eddie has always been so understanding and caring. It warmed his heart.

"But no, I get it. I pretended I had a girlfriend to please my mom when I was back in college."

Richie's eyes slightly widened at that,

"To please your mom?"

Eddie nodded slowly, "Yeah...Because she wasn't there to protect me anymore, so she was hooked on the idea I had someone else to care for me."

Richie bit his lip and looked down. He had forgotten how overprotective Eddie's mom was.

Richie jumped when Eddie suddenly slammed his hands on the table and called for another beer.

"Anyways, enough of that. Where have you been living, and how's it going there? Got any plants you've forgotten to water for weeks?"

Richie snorted at that and shook his head, "New Jersey actually. The place I got isn't too bad, so It's quite nice. And nope. No plants. It's hard enough to take care of myself."

Eddie smiled, "It's good you know that and aren't torturing any poor plants."

"Guess so." Richie smiled and then crossed his arms on the table, looking at Eddie, "How about you? How's New York treating you?"

Eddie took a drink of his beer and shrugged,

"It's been alright. Traffic half of the time is a complete shit show, and in some places, it fucking stinks. Like it *really* does stink. It's disgusting."

That made Richie let out a short laugh, Eddie smiled softly, "Other than that It's pretty good."

Richie drank his beer but then made a weird noise and put his hand up. Eddie looked at him a bit confused and concerned while Richie wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Have you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Ben and Bev are apparently going to model for some clothes company."

"What? No, I haven't fucking heard!"

"Yeah! Because Bev has her own fashion thing going on or whatever- This one company emailed her and basically said *'Hey, you're gorgeous and we love your work. Come and have a photoshoot'.*"

Eddie's eyes were wide. He scratched his head and sighed "I sometimes forget we all got lucky and actually got pretty successful. Holy shit."

Richie nodded and took another sip of his beer, "Yeah, our friends are becoming fucking models... Should I try out?"

Eddie looked at him with furrowed brows. He couldn't tell if Richie was being serious or not.

He laughed seconds later and said, "You kidding? You don't even know how to dress. They'll throw you out immediately."

Richie pouted and looked at his own outfit he was wearing right now, "What's wrong with the way I dress, you dick?"

Eddie continued to laugh and then patted Richie's shoulder, "Stick to comedy, pal."

Richie was gonna argue more, but Eddie interrupted, "How do you know this anyway?"

Richie sighed, collecting himself and then replied, "I've been talking to Beverly for a few months now. We call each other like two or twice a month. Sometimes two or twice a week."

Eddie smiled at him, and the fondness of it made Richie's stomach twist, "What's that for?"

Eddie chuckled and shrugged, "I don't know, I'm just glad you have someone to talk to, and It's Bev. You two used to be inseparable when we were kids."

That comment made Richie smile. His and Beverly's friendship has always been important to him, and it still is. She's so easy to talk to that It's comforting for Richie.

When they were kids, they hung out and sometimes smoked together after school. They'd vent to each other and give each other advice on things they could.

And Richie always suspected Beverly *might've* known back then that

Richie's gay. If she did, she never said anything about it and treated him the same as always, and that's all that Richie needed. For someone to accept him and not treat him any different. But that's only if she actually knew Richie's gay. The reason Richie suspected she knew was that after she'd talk about Bill, she'd always ask, "*How are you and Eddie doing? Everything alright?*" which seemed weird to ask after she just talked about her own relationship.

He still doesn't know if she knows about his sexuality, but he has a feeling that if he *did* come out to her, she'd accept him. Richie wanted to believe that so badly. Losing her to that would be too much.

"Yeah, I guess it is nice. She's great." Richie finally replied with a soft smile on his face.

Richie was gonna ask if Eddie's had contact with any of the other losers but figured if Eddie didn't know about Ben and Beverly, he probably doesn't know about Bill or Mike.

So instead of asking that, he asked,

"How are you and your wife?"

The smile on Eddie's face twitched for a second, and the fondness of it disappeared. Eddie looked at the table and shrugged,

"It's been a bit hard, honestly." Eddie sighed, "I mean, we're alright, but sometimes it gets a bit too much. She still asks me about what *actually* happened in Derry."

Richie couldn't help it. He felt a kind of *hate* towards the woman, even though he's never met her. Maybe it made Richie a bad person. He didn't care.

"But she's sweet and just wants me to be safe. I can't really get mad at her for that."

Hearing Eddie describe her as *sweet* made it even worse. The jealousy and anger burned deep in Richie's stomach.

He doesn't know much about their marriage. Richie doesn't know

their story or the things they do together.

Richie doesn't know if she makes Eddie laugh.

Richie doesn't know if she's made Eddie cry.

And Richie doesn't want to know, because if he finds out, he might just burst into flames.

"But overall we're good,"

Eddie said softly, not turning to look at Richie.

Richie remembered Eddie had come to see him to take a break from "work" so him asking that brought his mind back to it, and that's the opposite of what Eddie needed.

"Eddie, I'm sorry I shouldn't have asked It's none of my business."

"No, It's alright. You just wanted to know if we were alright, and we are. Thank you."

Richie suddenly felt sick. He felt nervous again. He *needed* to fix this.

"Hey, how about we go get some pastries?" Richie said, his voice wavering a tiny bit. Eddie hesitated for a few seconds but then looked at him, confused.

"There's a shop, and It's like right next to this bar." Eddie furrowed his brows, "A pastry shop next to a bar?"

"You're the one who lives in New York, bud. It's pretty weird if you haven't noticed."

A quiet chuckle.

*Oh, thank fuck.*

"I guess I'm pretty hungry. Sure."

Richie could fucking explode on the spot right now, he smiled and jumped off of the stool.

They both paid the bartender for their drinks and left the bar. It was pretty cold outside.

"Where did you get the idea for a damn pastry at this time?"

Eddie asked, and Richie shrugged, *I didn't want you to run off because of a dumb question I asked.*

"Can't blame a guy for getting hungry, can you? What do you want me to do, Eds? Starve?"

They both laughed, and it was like a huge weight was lifted from Richie's shoulders.

Richie can't afford to fuck this up. It's been months since he's seen Eddie, and leaving on a bad note is an unbearable thought.

This is easily the best day Richie's had in weeks. He needed this.

"No, I cannot."

Eddie saw the little pastry sign up ahead a little and started walking faster, "First one to the shop pays for the pastries!"

Before Richie could react, Eddie had already started running.

"Are you kidding me?!"

Richie shouted and started running as well, his back hurt from sitting in that stool for so long, so that slowed him down.

"Fuck you! I wasn't ready!"

Richie yelled even louder because Eddie was already opening the shop's door.

When Richie finally made it to the shop, Eddie was already standing there with a bag with some pastries in it.

"What flavor you get?"

Eddie opened up the bag and looked inside, "Apple cinnamon."

Richie nodded and pouted, making a weird little confirmation noise that meant *"Nice choice."*

Eddie patiently waited for Richie to pick out his own pastry of choice. Richie could just tell Eddie was standing there looking smug as hell because he beat Richie in a race.

In Richie's defence, he really had no idea that was even going to happen. But maybe he deserved it. However, it cheered Eddie back up, and that's what mattered.

In the end, Richie ended up picking some vanilla cream puff pastries. Eddie was still standing there with a smile, waiting for Richie not too far from the register.

Richie mocked Eddie by sticking his tongue out at him. Eddie did the same back at him.

Richie walked past him and snatched his bag of pastries to go pay for them and his own.

Eddie was waiting for him out of the shop. Richie passed him the bag of his apple cinnamon ones and kept his own in his hand.

"Very nice of you, Rich."

"Shut up."

"Not my fault, you can't run for shit, asshole."

"We're forty fucking years old. Why should I be running from anything?"

Richie noticed that was an invitation for Eddie to talk about safety in the streets and quickly spoke up again, "Nevermind I got it you can save it."

Eddie checked the time on his phone, and his smile fell slightly.

"I have to head back home."

Richie looked down at the ground and hit a rock out of the way.

When he looked back up at Eddie, he was already looking at him with another fond smile,

"Today was fucking great. I really needed this."

"Yeah, It was and me too."

*They needed each other.*

"Will I see you again?"

Richie asked, his voice full of worry.

Eddie smiled more,

"I'll be at your next show."

Richie's smile beamed.

"It better be a hundred times better than the shit that was today, though."

"It will. I'll take you out for a drink after?"

"Sounds great."

Richie felt tears forming in his eyes. He hasn't been this happy in so long.

Eddie looked at the bag in his hands and crunched it tighter shut, "Thanks for everything today. Especially these."

Richie laughed and nodded, "Not a problem at all, spaghetti."

Eddie's smile fell at the nickname, which made Richie laugh harder. Eddie couldn't help but smile a few seconds later.

Richie shortly calmed down and smiled at Eddie sadly.

Eddie looked at the direction he parked his car but then looked back at Richie.

He walked up to Richie and pulled him into a tight hug. Richie



immediately held onto him and closed his eyes. He breathed in, holding his breath, savoring every second of this hug.

He exhaled when Eddie let go.

"See you later, right?"

*Fuck*, Richie felt a tear run down his face.

Eddie remembered that from the last time they saw each other.

"Yeah, see you later, Eds."

Richie couldn't wait for his next show.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

i apologize for the small delay on chapters!! procrastination sucks ass. and though there aren't that many comments, they've all been really sweet and motivating! i'm glad you guys are enjoying this fic so far. there's still a lot to go around for these two considering this is a slow burn but it'll all be worth it later on. until then it's just two 40 year old gay repressed men flirting without knowing they're flirting. thank you again for the support ily

#### 4. They're making a heart

The past two weeks have been amazing.

Richie seriously hasn't felt this genuinely happy in *years*.

Eddie did come to his next show, and they went drinking together again afterward.

Then they went to get dinner, and Eddie talked about how today's show wasn't any better than the last one.

It felt nice to be in Eddie's company. It made Richie feel like they were kids again. Making fun of each other and talking about stuff that didn't make any sense.

When they had gone out drinking, and they'd started laughing about something stupid, Eddie had put his hand on Richie's shoulder and leaned in.

Eddie hadn't moved back for about thirty seconds or more; it felt like forever, though. He just stayed there, lightly giggling and gripping at Richie's shoulder.

Richie was frozen the entire time, laughing awkwardly because *what the fuck is happening?*

Until Eddie would notice what he was doing and pull back, laughing even harder and Richie joining in. Things going back to normal or as normal as they could.

Richie didn't think much of it. They were drunk off their asses, so it most likely meant nothing.

The next time they met was before Richie's show. Eddie was saying how he wasn't going to pay any more money only to be disappointed by Richie's awful jokes.

Richie had said, "*Alright, wanna chill backstage and go over those awful jokes together?*" to which Eddie had replied to with a smile, and Richie took that as a yes.

His manager wasn't pleased with Richie's decision to let Eddie go backstage. But Richie had explained how having him here was calming and motivating, so his manager let Eddie stay.

So a few minutes before rehearsal, they'd sit in the breakroom, going over the jokes.

*"Hey, Eds. Why did the cashier quit his job?"*

*Eddie cringed, scrunching up his nose as if bracing for impact,*

*"Why?"*

*"Because it was soda pressing!"*

*Richie was ready to explode with laughter. Meanwhile, Eddie groaned and put his face in his hands, "That's so fucking bad. Garbage."*

*"It's amazing!" Richie said and started laughing, maybe a bit too loud, "Soda pressing, Eddie!" He motioned with his hands, trying to exclaim that even more, "His job is soda pressing!"*

*"Yeah, I fucking get it, dude." Richie sounded as if he was crying, maybe he was. Eddie couldn't tell because Richie was hunched over now, his body shaking from laughing.*

*"Richie, that's seriously not even that funny." That only made Richie laugh harder. Eddie caught himself smiling, hearing Richie laugh like this made him happy. Even though the reason he was laughing was because of a shitty joke.*

*"Oh my god, that's fucking gold," Richie said before coughing and wiping his eyes "I need to put that in."*

*Eddie's eyes widened. He raised his hand and breathed in, "You are not putting that in."*

*"Yes, I am."*

*"No, you're not."*

*"I am."*

*Eddie rubbed his forehead, trying to calm himself, "Richie, I swear-"*

*"Soda pressing!"*

Richie giggled, remembering that.

He ended up not putting that joke in. Eddie had come up to him and thanked him after the show.

But It's been a few days since that. They barely ever texted each other, so Richie wasn't surprised to not hear from Eddie. It just sucks missing Eddie.

It feels like he's been missing Eddie his entire life, and he's sick of it. He doesn't want to miss him anymore. Especially not after what happened in Derry.

It astonishes Richie that he forgot Eddie. That he forgot the fucked up place he grew up in. All those years of his life were just erased.

The people he loved the most were just completely gone.

And somehow, in that Chinese restaurant, all of those feelings came *flooding* back.

His feelings for Eddie came flooding back.

Richie was caught off guard when he heard knocking on his door. He sighed and got up from his comfortable position on the couch.

The knocking got even louder, "I'm coming!" Richie shouted and unlocked the door, "What's the-"

The rest of Richie's sentence got thrown out the window.

"Hey, trashmouth,"

Eddie said softly. He was wearing the blue shirt he wore in Derry, except he now had a black jacket on as well. He looked fucking good.

Richie adjusted his glasses and stood a little straighter, but all he felt was even gayer.

"Spaghetti! What's uhh- What's up, dude?"

Richie replied and rested his left hand on the open door while he placed his right on his hip.

Well-aware that he was standing there in his boxers in front of the man he loves.

Eddie's eyes glanced down and then quickly back up,

"Did you just wake up or?"

"Listen, It's a Saturday, and I'm fucking tired. I can be as comfortable as I like."

Eddie let out half of a sigh and half of a laugh. Before Eddie could say anything else, Richie interrupted,

"What the hell are you doing out in New Jersey? You're stalking me?"

"What I can't come see you now?"

"I'd appreciate a little bit of a warning, thanks."

He motioned to the lower half of his body. Eddie's eyes refused to follow Richie's hands. Instead, he crossed his arms and sighed, "Fine, I'll just leave."

Eddie turned around to leave, "No, wait-" Richie's hand immediately flew to Eddie's shoulder.

Eddie turned back around, and Richie quickly slid his hand off of him, "I mean- Come on. Why are you here?"

Richie followed Eddie's hands when they went into his pocket and pulled out two tickets, "Myra and I were going to go to an aquarium together."

He started and gave one to Richie so he'd look it over, "But last-minute work thing happened, and she had to cancel."

Richie looked up at Eddie and squinted his eyes, "Soo, you're here

because..?"

"That means I have one ticket to spare" Richie's expression didn't change.

Eddie sighed, "I want you to come with me, idiot."

Richie's mouth formed into an "*Ohh..*" expression, and Eddie nodded, "Yeah, dumbass. *Ohh...*" He mocked Richie.

"Let me get this straight...You want *me* to come with *you* to an aquarium because your wife couldn't."

Eddie stood still for a few seconds and then nodded again, "Pretty much, yeah."

Richie didn't know what else to say. What *do* you say? Your wife cancels pretty much what's supposed to be a date, so you come to me?

"Does she... Know about this?"

Eddie hesitated for a bit but then answered,

"She thinks It's a work thing."

Richie scratched the back of his neck. This is a situation he thought he'd never be in.

"That's healthy." Maybe that wasn't something you should say out loud.

Richie wasn't expecting Eddie just to sigh. Eddie looked at him, "So you're not coming?"

Richie looked back at the ticket. Going to an aquarium with Eddie feels like a dream he'd have as a teenager. Maybe he's had one like that.

"Fuck it. Sure, I'll look at some fishes with you,"

Richie paused, remembering he still isn't dressed,

"Right after I put some clothes on." He turned around and started jogging over to his room, "Make yourself at home, I guess!"

Eddie walked in and looked around. Richie's living room wasn't as messy as Eddie had expected, considering Richie didn't even know he was coming.

"Where is the aquarium anyway?" Richie shouted as he jumped into a pair of jeans.

"It's right here in New Jersey, actually! After you said you lived here, I wanted to know how things were here."

Richie stopped moving to try and hear Eddie better, his voice had quieted down, "Myra must've seen me at some point, so I guess she wanted to take us someplace nice."

It warmed Richie's heart, knowing Eddie came to him out of all people to go to that aquarium with. Maybe It's just because Richie lives in New Jersey, and he's the best option but still.

Richie likes to think Eddie secretly enjoys his company. That makes it hurt a little less to think that Eddie might never love him the way Richie loves him. Richie can only dream of that.

Eddie married someone, a woman specifically. Eddie has spent five years with her, so something must be there. Something Richie just doesn't have. Maybe Eddie's not even gay. Who fucking knows.

"You coming out any time soon?"

Richie felt like he was ten seconds away from an aneurysm,

"Wh-What?"

"Are you stuck in your pants or something?"

*Oh, he meant the room. Jesus fucking Christ.* Richie sighed in relief and finally walked out to see Eddie leaning against the couch.

"You haven't said I live in a garbage pile yet," Richie said, squinting his eyes. Eddie smiled a little, "Well, It's because from this room It

doesn't look like a garbage pile. That's surprising."

Richie nodded, accepting the *'praise.'*

"As you can see, I am not a complete snob."

"I haven't seen the rest of your apartment, though."

Eddie leaned to the side a little, glancing down the hallway leading to Richie's room.

"Yeah, about that-" Richie swung an arm around Eddie's shoulders and started walking them both to the door, "No time to give you the full tour today, pal."

Eddie snickered, "I knew things were too good to be true."

"Y'know I really don't appreciate you treating me like I can't keep my rooms squeaky clean,"

Richie said, half-joking and half not.

"Well, *can* you keep your rooms squeaky clean?"

Richie locked his apartment's door and then turned to Eddie, thinking over a reply.

"Touché."

---

Getting to the aquarium didn't take long. Maybe it did, but Richie arguing with Eddie about why clownfish don't actually look like clowns really made time speed up.

*"It's a clownfish! Shouldn't it be red, yellow, blue, and not just orange and white?"*

*"Richie, why the fuck does it matter?"*



*"Because it does! They shouldn't be called clownfish if they don't resemble clowns!"*

*Eddie gripped the steering wheel so tight his knuckles were turning white, "You're the only person in the world that can piss me off so bad over fish of all things."*

*"Did you just call me special?" Richie gasped and put his hands on his chest, "Eddie, that's so sweet.."*

*Eddie took a deep breath, "I'm not going to punch you, I shouldn't and I won't."*

*"They should be called candy corn fish!"*

Maybe that explained why Eddie looked a bit grumpy after the car ride.

They walked into the aquarium, gave the worker their two tickets, and started walking up the stairs. The first thing they saw was some penguins.

Richie walked up to the glass and crouched, trying to get eye level with one, "Look at this lil guy!"

He said in a high pitched voice, glanced at Eddie, and then back at the penguin.

But another penguin came along and pushed the one Richie was looking at into the water. He could hear Eddie laughing beside him.

"That's not cool." Richie said and stood up, "Did you see that shit? He just didn't care!" Eddie continued to laugh.

Richie shook his head, "You're laughing about this, Eddie, but this is serious. That poor guy probably gets bullied."

"Richie, they're penguins."

"Really? I thought they were parrots."

Eddie giggled, and Richie smiled. The penguins were standing in a

little group with others swimming around in the water.

Richie hadn't noticed Eddie had already wandered off and was looking at some seahorses now.

He walked up beside Eddie, who pointed at a pair of seahorses, "Look at those two. They're making a heart."

Richie covered his mouth with his hand to hide a laugh. Eddie furrowed his brows and looked at Richie, "What's so funny about that?"

"Eddie, come on."

"What?"

Richie chuckled, "Eddie..."

"What, dickhead?"

"Those seahorses are fucking."

Eddie's eyes widened for a second, and then he looked back at them, "No, they're not."

Richie couldn't help it, and he just burst out laughing. Eddie's face was so serious like he couldn't tell if Richie was joking or not, "Are you telling me I was just looking at- You're joking."

"You're so stupid, holy shit!"

"How was I supposed to know what two seahorses having sex look like!"

Richie slapped his thigh while laughing, making Eddie glare at him, "I can't fucking stand you, dude."

Eddie said, and power walked somewhere else. "What did I do?" Richie asked in between laughs, following Eddie.

*"Look at them. They're so romantic making a heart!"* Richie mocked Eddie, making Eddie lightly punch Richie's shoulder.

"Shut up about that and look at these stingrays,"

Eddie said and pointed down at them. Richie leaned over the little stone wall and placed his hand on it.

Eddie had brought his hand up to place it in the same place at the same time, so Eddie's hand had landed on top of Richie's for a few seconds.

Richie would be lying if that didn't make his heart speed up. What is he? A teenager? Fucking hell, maybe he's a bit touch starved.

Eddie put his hand in the water and pet the stingrays that swam by.

Richie looked at him. He observed Eddie's face and how some strands of hair fell into his face when he was looking down at something.

Oh, how badly he just wanted to reach up and put them out of the way.

"They feel so smooth," Eddie commented. Richie quickly brought his attention back to the stingrays, "That's because they are."

Richie put his hand in the water and watched one of them swimming up to him, "Give me high five!"

It swam by, and Richie lightly tapped the stingray's fin. He gasped, bringing Eddie's attention to him, "He actually did!"

Eddie turned back to the stingrays and whispered, "Give me high five!".

And the stingray swimming by did. He gasped and turned to Richie.

They both started laughing, and Eddie shook his head. "We're literally twelve years old."

"We were busy chasing a killer clown when we were twelve. We fucking deserve this."

Eddie giggled, "We deserve to be high fived by stingrays because of our childhood trauma?"

"Hell yeah, man!" Richie held up his hand. Eddie smiled and high fived him.

Richie laughed and got up and without noticing, helped Eddie up by grabbing his hand.

Noticing what he just did, Richie felt like running off, until Eddie smiled up at him and whispered thanks.

The next animals they went to see were the turtles. One of them was swimming up in the corner and seemed to be stuck between the decoration branches. Or it was just a little stupid and trying to swim through them.

"That poor guy is stuck. Go help him, Eds."

"Yeah, Richie, because I can totally just do that and not get arrested."

Richie let out a short laugh and smiled. He noticed a sign that said "*Viewing tube*" and tugged on Eddie's shirt.

He got Eddie to look at the sign and already started walking in the direction it was.

"Woah..." Richie whispered and looked around. There were some sharks and other fish swimming around.

"Okay, maybe this is somewhat cool," Richie overheard Eddie say as he walked by the glass.

Richie saw Eddie place his hand on the glass and ran over to him to bat it away, "The fuck?"

"Don't put your hand on the glass!"

"Why not?" Richie smiled and adjusted his glasses, "Because the sharks will bite it off."

Eddie rolled his eyes, Richie only smiled wider.

Richie noticed some parents taking a photo of their kids and looked back at Eddie.

The blue light from the tanks was reflecting on Eddie's black jacket. The light was low and soft, Eddie looks beautiful in it.

But in Richie's eyes, Eddie looks beautiful pretty much all the time.

"Excuse me?" Richie tapped a man's shoulder and pulled out his phone. The man turned to him, and his eyes widened, "Holy shit are you-"

"Richie Tozier? Trashmouth? Yup, that's me, pal."

The man was pulling out his own phone, but Richie stopped him, "How about you take a photo of my friend and me first and then you can get a photo with me?"

Richie smiled when the man nodded quickly and took Richie's phone out of his hands.

Richie walked up to Eddie and pulled him into the centre of the walkway. "What are you-"

"Smile for the camera, spaghetti!"

Eddie noticed the man. He was going to argue for a quick second but then noticed how quite nice of Richie this was.

Richie wanted a photo of them together here. That thought made Eddie smile, and he genuinely smiled at the camera.

Richie wrapped his arm around Eddie's shoulder and smiled, maybe a bit too big.

"You want a photo of just yourself?" Richie asked through his smile.

"No, that's alright. Just send this one to me later."

That made Richie's heart skip a beat. Maybe he's just reading too much into it, but *fuck*.

"Alright, here you go!" The man handed Richie his phone back, and Richie held it so Eddie and he could both see it.

"You dick, did you seriously give me horns in that one?"

"What? No, you're imagining stuff."

Eddie's mouth formed into a line and Richie chuckled, "Alright, don't run off, I need to take a photo with a fan."

"With a fan...Jesus Christ." Eddie whispered with the *tinies*t smile and turned his attention back to the fish.

---

They had spent about an hour in the aquarium by now, there were lots of animals, and they wanted to look at them all, so that's what they were doing.

They had already looked at the hippos, the big octopus that almost gave both of them a heart attack, lobsters, frogs, and other animals.

"So what's left?" Eddie asked and looked at the map that was pinned on the wall. Richie, however, walked around the area and looked around.

"Hey, Eddie! Take a look at this!"

Richie shouted and stared at the fish in the aquarium with a big smile. Eddie slowly approached him and made a face of disgust, "What the hell is that?"

"It's you."

The glare Eddie gave Richie made him laugh, "Very funny, dick. You're uglier than whatever that is."

"It's a blobfish. Be respectful."

Richie stepped closer and looked at it more carefully, "It looks quite sad. You've probably made it cry, but we can't see it."

Eddie sighed, "Yeah, It's sad because it resembles you."

Richie gasped and stood back up, "You sure are mean, Eds."

Eddie threw up his arms in the air for a second, "You're the one that called me it in the first place!" Eddie turned around and started walking, "I'm going to see the dolphins."

"Not without me, you're not!" Richie chased after him with his big stupid smile still on his face.

They stood at the pool and watched the dolphins swim and jump around.

"Holy shit, they're cute," Richie said in awe.

"Yeah, They're actually really cute." Eddie agreed and smiled.

They were standing awfully close to each other, Richie could feel his face becoming hotter. Their arms were brushing against each other.

Richie ached to pull Eddie closer by his waist. He looked at Eddie's face and admired how handsome he had actually become. His jawline and cheekbones had the power to make Richie's knees weak, yet when he was little, all he thought of when he looked at Eddie was: *Cute, cute, cute, really cute.*

"Don't you think?"

Richie jumped when Eddie looked at him, and he snapped out of his thoughts. Did Eddie catch him looking at him? Alright, just insult him, that'll fix any situation anytime.

"That one looks like you."

He pointed at the first dolphin he saw. He hadn't even really seen how that dolphin looked like, he just panicked.

Eddie furrowed his brows and looked at the dolphin, "Is that...A compliment?"

Richie looked at the dolphin longer and noticed that it was the one

they had been calling cute earlier. *Oh, fuck.*

"Well, It's- No, It's- Maybe? No, It's a joke" Eddie's face expression was even more confused now.

Richie just compared Eddie to a dolphin. A *cute* dolphin, they're all cute, but- How does this even happen to him?

"Anyway, you didn't answer my question."

Richie scratched his head and then squinted his eyes, "What was the question again?"

Eddie sighed and crossed his arms, "I had asked if you think dolphins are like... The dogs of the sea."

Richie lightly chuckled at that, "Aren't you confusing dolphins with seals?"

Eddie shrugged, "I don't know, I just remember hearing '*dogs of the sea*' on animal planet."

"Why would I know the answer to that anyway?"

"I asked if you think, dumbass. Also, you know about seahorse sex, so what else do you know about the sea?"

Richie laughed and then mocked Eddie again, "*They're making a heart, Richie!*"

Eddie rubbed his forehead, "Alright, If I listen to you any longer, I think my eardrums will burst."

They started making their way to the exit, Richie reached up with his hand and ruffled Eddie's hair, Eddie immediately swatted it away, "Aw, is it because of my mega sexy voice?"

"I'm going to punch you."

"*If* you can reach me."

Eddie stopped in his tracks, and Richie froze.



Eddie turned to face Richie and stepped a bit closer, "There are other ways I can get you down on your knees."

Okay, Richie wasn't expecting to hear *that*. He could feel his face getting redder now and a lump forming in his throat, what the *fuck* do you reply to that?

Eddie smirked softly, "And I mean by kicking you so hard your balls go up your ass."

Richie's eyes widened, and he laughed nervously, yeah, that's totally what went to Richie's mind when Eddie had said that.

"Okay, okay, I take it back. You can take down Godzilla. I get it."

Eddie stepped further back and nodded, feeling confident. While Richie felt like he was going to melt into a fucking puddle.

Is Eddie not aware of what that sounded like? Richie let out a deep sigh and continued following Eddie to the exit, *Jesus Christ this hypochondriac is gonna be the death of me.*

They stood outside of the aquarium in silence, not sure what they should do next.

*Is this goodbye? Please don't be goodbye.*

"How about we go eat?"

Richie could honestly fly into space right now out of pure joy. On the outside, he smiled lightly and nodded, "Sure, looking at all that fish made me hungry."

Eddie chuckled, and they both started walking to Eddie's car. Richie stopped for a second and lifted a finger in the air and squinted, "Didn't you say if you listen to me speak any longer your eardrums will explode?"

Eddie froze and then noticed that *Oh, shit, I did.*

Richie lifted his chin and put his hands in his pockets.

Eddie rolled his eyes, "Alright, maybe they healed a little bit while we got to the exit."

"I promise to talk the whole drive to the restaurant."

Eddie unlocked his car and looked at Richie, "You're lucky I can tolerate your shit."

Richie smiled at that, Eddie really has been one of the only people that have stayed with Richie through everything, since they were kids.

Richie sometimes thinks he doesn't deserve Eddie.

"Yeah, I guess I am."

## 5. I don't wanna be your friend, I want to kiss your lips

Richie was serious.

He *did* talk the whole drive to the restaurant.

It was winter, so it got dark rather quickly. Richie would catch himself looking at Eddie and how the streetlights reflected on his face. How the lights would dim and glow as they drove. They'd point out all of the beautiful features Eddie has. Richie could look at him all day.

Eddie could see Richie looking at him in the corner of his eye, but he didn't say anything about it.

Until Eddie thought maybe I should just point that out, which he did.

"What's up? You fell kinda silent, and you're staring at me."

Richie jumped a tiny bit when Eddie had started talking. He cleared his throat and shrugged, "Thinking about how ugly you look."

"Oh, fuck you. Forget I said anything, asshole."

A frown appeared on Richie's face for about a second, "I'm kidding, dude."

*You actually look great. I mean, we're fucking forty! Dile it down a bit.*

Richie nudged at his glasses, "I was thinking about how we're fucking old."

Eddie scoffed, "Don't look at me then, pal. The mirror is right there."

"I hate that you're right."

Richie ran a hand through his hair. Fucking *kill me if I start balding*.

"Y'know, after one of my shows this one kid comes up to me, right?"

Eddie nods, waiting for Richie to continue. Richie lets out a chuckle,

"and you know what he says?"

Richie lets out another chuckle, he says "Are you the old man my grandmother plays bingo with?"

Eddie burst out a laugh and quickly covered his mouth, Richie smiles and continues, "And I'm just standing there like *what the fuck?* So I just say '*No, I am not.*' "

He can hear Eddie trying his best to push down another laugh. "And then the kid dares to tell me '*Oh, sorry then. Your receding hairline looks familiar to the actual guy.*' "

And Eddie cracks, throwing his hand back on the steering wheel, full-on laughing now.

Richie starts laughing as well, "Who the fuck says that to someone? Teenagers are the fucking worst, Eddie. They're a *nightmare.*"

"Receding hairline!" Eddie whispered and laughed harder.

"It's not funny, man!" Richie said, but he was laughing too, "I thought about that sentence for a whole *week* it fucked me up that bad!"

Eddie wiped the tears he had in his eyes from laughing so hard, "That kid deserves a fucking medal. I'd give him a high five if I could."

"You're laughing right now, but if he had said that to you, you would've cried on the spot."

"No, I wouldn't!"

Eddie paused and then smiled softly, "I'd go home and *then* cry."

Richie laughed and then smiled at Eddie. The yellow lights glossing over his face and then disappearing again.

He could spend eternity in this car with him. Nobody else, just him and Eddie.

"You're paying for the food."

Richie furrowed his eyebrows, "Excuse me?"

"I paid for your stupid ass first show, you still owe me."

"It's not my fault you didn't come to me directly! I would've let you in for free, Idiot."

"Then you're paying for how horrible the jokes were."

Richie let out a half-laugh and half-sigh and looked out the window, "Fine. Screw you, man."

"Thanks, Rich," Eddie whispered, and he meant it.

Richie swore he could feel his heart jump right then.

*God, I'm still a damn a teenage boy with a crush.*

---

The restaurant was nothing that fancy. It was just an average restaurant. It did remind them of the one they were at Derry, though.

They sat near the windows, the night sky was full of stars, and that could bring up a conversation if things go south.

"How have things been?"

Eddie asked. They had no idea where the waiter was so figured they'd talk to pass the time.

Richie shrugged, "Same old shit, I guess." He grabbed one of the napkins and started folding it, "My New York tour is ending soon, and then I'm off to California."

Eddie crossed his arms and frowned, "When are you leaving for California?" His voice was gentle, with some sadness behind it.

"I squeeze out these dates in New York, then I get a week free, and then I go."

Eddie nodded and stared at the scrunched up napkin Richie was fidgeting with.

"Isn't Netflix going to pick you up soon too?"

Richie smiled, "Have you been doing some digging on me?"

"No, dumbass. I just saw some articles about you and them."

Richie smiled at the fact that Eddie actually looked through them.

"Well, yeah. My manager is reading into it. If things go well in California or something else peaks while I'm in New York, I should be set."

Richie just knew Eddie rolled his eyes. "I still cannot fathom how people listen to your jokes. I don't think I ever will."

"Give it time, Spaghetti."

"I've given it twenty-seven years, and you're less funny than you were as a kid."

"*Ha!*" Richie pointed at Eddie. Eddie looked at him with confusion and grabbed Richie's arm, pulling it down, so he wasn't pointing at him.

"Richie, that's so fucking rude to point at people and just shout inside of a restaurant!"

"You just admitted it!" Richie beamed.

"What the hell did I admit?"

"That you thought I was funny as a kid!"

Eddie sighed and ran his hands over his face, "That is *not* what I had meant."

"Oh, yeah? Accept defeat, buddy!"

Eddie glared at Richie, and his eyes glanced at the napkin that was in Richie's hand, "Put down this poor napkin."

He snatched it out of Richie's hand, and their fingers brushed against each other.

"This looks like origami done by a toddler,"

Eddie said as he examined it. A boy approached the two of them and nearly dropped his notepad.

"Holy shit."

Richie looked to his left and saw the waiter whose mouth was agape like he saw a ghost. Richie glanced at Eddie and then back at the waiter.

"You're Richie Tozier. Trashmouth?"

Richie relaxed more after that and nodded with a small smirk, "Yeah, that's me."

"Dude, I love your skits they're hilarious!"

Richie could see Eddie pinch the bridge of his nose in the corner of his eye.

"I'm glad to hear it! You want a picture?"

The boy smiled, and it kind of warmed Richie's heart. "Seriously? I'd love to!"

He glanced back and saw a waitress glaring at him, "But maybe a little bit later."

Richie noticed the woman and chuckled, "That's alright, don't worry 'bout it."

The boy glanced at Eddie and then back at Richie. "Are you- That's so sweet!"

Eddie looked at the boy in utter confusion. He's a risk analyst, and he has no social media, how could this teenager know anything-

"You must be Richie Tozier's boyfriend!"

Richie felt as if his jaw dropped to the floor. If he were drinking something right now, it'd be all over the table.

His eyes widened, and he glanced at Eddie, who was still sitting there processing what the boy had just said.

"I'm so happy for you two!"

The boy was so jittery and happy Richie had no clue where to start. Each show he has at least two jokes about his non-existent girlfriend where did the kid get this idea?

He swallowed the lump in his throat and shook his head, he glanced at Eddie again and noticed he still hadn't blinked.

"Kid, listen we're-"

"I'm sorry, I'll be out of your hair in a minute. It's just that I'm gay myself," Was Richie even breathing? This has never happened to him. It kinda felt like he was back in that arcade, but this time not actually being bullied for who he is. The kid beamed at Richie, "Having someone I look up to be LGBT as well is amazing!"

Coming out in a restaurant in front of a random waiter right now in front of his childhood crush maybe isn't the best idea.

So Richie had to make a choice right now. Does he go along with it? Or does he say he's got it all wrong?

But not everything that the boy presumed is wrong. Richie *is* LGBT. He's gay to be exact. It's just the dating part that is wrong.

The grin on the boy's face was so wide it made Richie feel bad for a second.

He probably sees Richie as a, what do the kids call it? *Geez*, Richie is old.

Ah, yes. He probably sees Richie as a "*Gay Icon*".

He had read that phrase somewhere on the internet and laughed about it for about two whole minutes.



Richie thought it was stupid, but the more he thought about it he started thinking It's actually quite sweet.

Meanwhile, Eddie had finally realised what situation he's in and cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry, but we're not dating." Richie felt that as a stab in his own gut. The boy wasn't smiling as wide as he was a few seconds ago.

"I'm actually married to someone else. A woman." Eddie showed him his ring.

Salt in the fucking wound.

The boy nodded, collecting himself. "Shit, I can't explain how sorry I am-"

"No, It's alright you didn't know,"

Richie reassured him, "Don't worry about it, kid. And we can still get that picture."

He said and smiled. The boy smiled back. "Okay, man. I'll get you a new waiter. I have to check something. Again, I'm sorry for assuming."

Richie watched as the kid walked away from the table up to a different waiter.

He looked at Eddie. He was staring at the ring on his finger. He didn't look happy. *Fuck.*

As if Richie couldn't feel any shittier for crushing on his childhood best friend who is married to a *woman*. Life isn't fucking fair, is it?

Then again, him going along with the story wouldn't have been any better. The kid probably would've shared this on the internet somewhere, and Richie would be *fucked*.

Eddie's wife definitely wouldn't have been happy either.

But for a minute Richie could pretend Eddie *was* his boyfriend. He

could pretend he was Eddie's *boyfriend* for a short while before things went to shit again.

It doesn't matter, really. Richie has been pretending his whole life. Just not about that.

Richie sighed and adjusted his glasses. He noticed that he did that when he's nervous. "I'm sorry, Eds. That was so awkward I wasn't expecting-"

"It's alright, don't worry about it. You made the kid happy."

Eddie smiled at him, and Richie smiled back for a second. They both simultaneously grabbed the menu's and started going through them. Richie glanced at Eddie a few times during so.

It's good that the waitress was coming up, so they didn't have to sit in silence for long.

"Hello, gentlemen. What would you like to order?"

Richie placed down the menu and looked at her, "Fish and chips," he looked at Eddie who was now giving him an *"Are you serious?"* look. Richie stifled a chuckled.

"And for drinking, I'll be healthy and choose water." Richie's actually way too dehydrated, so maybe he just ordered water to impress Eddie.

Richie thought about it, *why would ordering water impress someone? Dumbass.*

"And you, sir?" "Pasta with sauce and a side of salad and I'll take water as well."

Richie rolled his eyes and mouthed *"side of salad? pfft."* Eddie smiled and squinted his eyes.

"Your orders will be here shortly." She walked off, and Eddie immediately started talking "Fish and sticks? We were just at an aquarium!"

"Exactly!"

"That's fucked!"

"No, It's not! I'm hungry, and I want fish."

"So if a damn blobfish were brought to your table, you'd eat it?"

Richie thought about it and nodded, which made Eddie groan, "You fascinate me."

Even though Eddie hadn't meant it that way, it still made Richie's heart speed up. He laughed, "Well if it were all cooked and pretty I'd eat it!"

"Do people even eat blobfish?"

Eddie asked, and Richie shrugged again, "Don't know. What do you think It'd taste like?"

"I don't want to answer that." "Maybe they'd taste like jelly but with no flavor. Like it's just wet and slippery-"

Richie stopped his sentence there. He hadn't even meant to put it that way, but it gave him an idea, and he smirked, about to add to that sentence, but Eddie interrupted him,

"If you say like my mother's vagina I will seriously deck you right here and right now."

Richie laughed, "I would never!"

"Don't think I've forgotten the shit you said about her when we were kids."

Richie remembered one of the jokes and smirked again, "Do you remember the one when Beverly's bathroom was covered in blood, and I said-"

"Yes, now shut the hell up about my deceased mother. Even in death, she can't escape your bullshit."

Richie wasn't sure whether to laugh at that or not, but then Eddie laughed, and so did he.

The food was brought to their table, and they thanked the waitress before digging in.

Or at least before Richie started digging in, "Dude, calm down the food isn't gonna run off."

Eddie grimaced, and Richie wiped his mouth, "I haven't eaten much today and in awhile. Fuck off and eat your salad if you're so healthy."

"I *am* healthy in fact. Are you?"

Richie snorted, "Do I look like someone who works out or eats healthy?"

Eddie chuckled, "Well, you still look pretty good which is a shock."

Richie choked on a chip and started coughing, Eddie was about to get up and help, but Richie waved that he's alright.

He collected himself and smiled, "Thanks," He thought about it and decided to be a bit brave, "You look *really* good, actually."

Eddie's lips formed a smile, and he ate a few pieces of pasta before replying, "Woah, thanks, Rich."

Richie panicked, maybe he was a bit too brave.

"Y'know... For an old man."

Eddie's smile disappeared, and instead, he glared at Richie, "You do realise we're both old?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Eddie sighed and reached for his water. Richie smiled, annoying Eddie is something he has always been good at.

Making jokes about his mom and him is also something Richie has always been good at.

But showing his actual feelings? Never in a million years, he'll be good at that.

When they were kids, Richie would make mom jokes and pinch Eddie's cheeks. He'd steal whatever Eddie would hold onto and hold it above his head just so that Eddie would be pulling at him.

Both of those things would end with Eddie being pissed off, but the thrill of Eddie's hands in his own was something that drove him over the moon.

He was only a kid, so he didn't know what those feelings meant. He just knew they made him feel like himself, that Eddie's attention made him happy, and he only wanted more of it.

Whereas he couldn't care less for the girls at school. They didn't even bat an eye at him in the halls anyway. Even in his teenage years before Eddie left, he only wanted Eddie's attention.

While his mom was asking if he likes any girls he was thinking about if Eddie will be able to hang out this weekend. He'd end up just changing the topic.

"You going to finish up anytime soon?"

Richie noticed Eddie's plate was clean, while he still had some chips left, "And you told *me* the food wasn't gonna run off."

"Oh, shut up. While you were zoning out, I was actually paying attention to my meal."

Richie pushed the napkins that were in the middle of the table and pushed his plate there instead, "Help me finish it all then."

Eddie gladly grabbed a few chips from the plate and started biting down on them, Richie smiled and started eating them as well.

---

Before leaving the restaurant Richie had remembered about the boy he wanted to take a photo with, so he went and did exactly that.

Eddie waited outside for him on the stairs. Once Richie had finally appeared, Eddie pointed out the park that wasn't far at all from the restaurant and suggested they go there.

It was started to get cold, so when Richie went to put his hands in his jacket's pockets, his left hand brushed against Eddie's. Neither of them mentioned it.

"Rich." Eddie said and froze, and Richie did as well, "What's up?"

He was smiling and looking at the sky. It had started to snow.

"Well look at that."

A smile crept up on Richie's face, and he held out his right hand so some snowflakes would fall on it.

It was snowing heavily now. Snowflakes were falling on top of their hair and shoulders. Richie has lost count how many times he's looked at Eddie like he's his whole world. Which he is.

Richie stuck out his tongue and started catching the snowflakes. Eddie laughed, "You look so dumb."

Richie giggled and continued to stumble around and stand on his tiptoes to catch more, "You're just mad you know I can catch more than you."

"I am not competing with you over this." Eddie started walking again, and he fiercely pulled Richie back on the sidewalk, he had stumbled into the planted flowers.

The park was wide and with many trees. Small lights and Christmas decorations were already put up around the place.

Richie wondered how he was going to celebrate Christmas. He hasn't spoken to his parents for a long time. He just hoped he wasn't gonna be alone.

He noticed that not much, but enough snow was coating the ground, and he got an idea. While Eddie continued walking, Richie crouched down and scooped up some of the snow, forming a small snowball. He started chuckling, and that must've made Eddie notice Richie wasn't next to him, so he turned around.

Eddie immediately brought up one of his hands and pointed at the snowball, "Richie, you listen to me very carefully."

Richie replied with a "*Aha*" as he stood up and took a small step closer to Eddie. Eddie backed up, "If you throw that at me."

"What?" Richie replied and took another step closer.

"I will *end* you." Eddie threatened, and Richie smiled wider.

Richie stopped and then nodded, loosening his grip on the snowball, making Eddie relax and drop his arm back to his side.

A few seconds passed before another smirk appeared on Richie's face and he held the snowball back, "Richie, don't you fucking da-"

He threw the snowball directly in Eddie's face. Eddie gasped, and Richie started laughing harder.

He brought his hands up to his face to clean the snow up and then glared at Richie like he was an angry god.

"Oh, it is *on*." They both ran to different sides of the park and started making snowballs.

While Richie was making one of them, he felt a snowball hit the back of his head. The snow fell into the crook of his neck making him hiss and shout, "Fuck! That's fucking cold!"

Now Eddie was the one laughing, "Taste of your own medicine, dickhead!"

Eddie threw another snowball, but Richie stood up and turned in time, so it hit his stomach. Richie threw one snowball after the other, Eddie had managed all of them, which Richie found unfair, "Dude, can you not?" He shouted, and Eddie laughed, "Learn how to throw,

fucker!"

Richie cursed under his breath and dashed towards Eddie. Eddie saw him running up to him, so he started running as well.

Eddie would turn around to try and throw a snowball at Richie, but because they were running, it was hard to aim.

They both started laughing, and Richie said, "I'm going to bury you in the snow!"

"If you can even catch me!" Eddie sped up, and Richie groaned, "You're supposed to have an aching back not fast legs at this age!"

Richie slowed down and took this as a chance to make more snowballs.

It felt like they were kids again, not a single care about the world.

Eddie hid behind a tree, so when Richie turned around to spot him, he felt a snowball hit his back. Richie didn't move. He instead listened to the snow crunch under Eddie's feet.

He figured he was standing not too far behind him.

Richie turned around and started throwing all of the snowballs he had made, and they finally hit Eddie, "Oh, Jesus!" Eddie shouted and turned around.

He tried to throw a snowball backwards, which wasn't even close, and that made Richie laugh.

Richie had no snowballs left, and it didn't look like Eddie had any left either. So when Eddie turned around, he wasn't expecting him so start running towards him at full speed.

He didn't even have time to react, Eddie's body clashed into his, and that sent them both flying to the cold, hard ground.

Eddie had landed on top of him, and he was laughing and panting in Richie's shoulder. Richie couldn't even almost feel the sting of when his head hit the ground, he was too busy thinking about Eddie's



weight on top of him. How Eddie was pretty much pinning Richie to the ground, their legs had gotten tangled.

They were both panting, little clouds appearing in the cold air from their breaths. Richie didn't feel cold, Eddie kept him warm.

Once Eddie finally lifted up his head, their eyes locked and Eddie pushed himself up a bit, so his hands were at the sides of Richie's head.

None of them said a thing, they just breathed in unison and stared at the other.

Richie's glasses were crooked, so Eddie adjusted them for him. Richie felt like he couldn't breathe.

His lips had darted to Eddie's. They were red and a little bit chapped from the cold air. His eyes went back up to Eddie's, and suddenly he remembered what had happened in Neibolt.

Eddie was on top of him too then, shouting about how he had killed Pennywise. He was so happy. Eddie had saved Richie's life.

The horrible memories of what he saw in the deadlights came back. Eddie dying over and over.

Richie was almost too late to push Eddie out of the way.

He was caught out of those thoughts when Eddie pressed a snowball in Richie's face.

"What the fuck-" Eddie was laughing, his head bent slightly lower, they were so very close.

But good things don't last forever, so Eddie stood up shortly after that, still laughing.

He saw Eddie hold out his hand and he grabbed it, pulling him up from the ground.

They looked like they had both fallen into a pool of snow. That thought made both of them laugh.

Eddie's hair was a complete mess. It looked almost white from all the snow that had gotten in his hair.

*God, Richie's so fucking in love.*

They both made their way to a bench and sat down on it. Richie didn't even clean the snow off which he probably should've done because his ass was freezing. Literally.

"We're both idiots. Complete idiots."

Eddie said softly, and Richie nodded, huffing out a short laugh, "Yeah, we are."

It fell somewhat silent after that. He noticed Eddie had a frown on his face.

"Rich, I'm sorry I was kinda weird when-" He sighed, "When you had asked me about my wife when we first met."

Richie let him continue. "It's just that... Things aren't going well. That's the truth."

Eddie looked at him, "You were right today. It's not a healthy relationship."

That made Richie frown as well, *'I was right to hate that bitch all along.'*

"She's pretty much a copy of my mother. It sometimes feels like I'm locked in a damn cage. I felt like that when I was a kid too." Eddie ran his hands over his face, "It's a loveless marriage, Rich. She makes me feel weak. She twists her words and twists my thoughts. I would've left a long time ago if I could've."

*Fucking Christ.* Eddie was telling him all of this. He really trusts him.

"You have no idea how miserable I felt that night in Derry. When you had caught me awake. I felt completely pathetic because I was gonna run back into her arms."

Richie turned on the bench a bit to face Eddie more, "Eddie, listen to me."

Eddie dropped his hands from his face and looked at Richie.

"You're the bravest person I know. You're a grown man who can do whatever the fuck he wants. Leave her ass and find true happiness. You fucking deserve it, you hear me?"

Eddie let out a small laugh. Richie continued, "I'm serious, dude. You're a lot braver than I'll ever be. Leave your carbon copy of your mother and do whatever you want, wherever you want. *You* control your life. She doesn't."

The smile on Eddie's face was so gentle and sweet, Richie couldn't do anything other than smile back.

"Thank you, Rich. I wish it was that easy, though."

Eddie looked back down, and Richie scooted closer, their pinkie fingers overlapping each other, "I believe in you, man. Always have."

Richie's eyes met with Eddie's. His face was only inches apart. Richie felt like he was going to jump out of his skin, his heartbeat was running a damn marathon.

He felt Eddie lock his pinky finger with his. "You do?" His voice was quiet and soft.

"Of course, I do. And no matter what happens, you'll always have me."

There's no way this is real. Are Eddie's eyes on his lips or has Richie went completely mad?

Richie thought about all the times he's called Eddie a friend. He's never wanted to be his friend, has he?

If Richie wanted to be Eddie's friend, he wouldn't feel like the only thing he's ever wanted was to have Eddie's lips on his.

It felt like gravity was pulling them together; their faces were inching closer to one another. This felt like a dream.

He could now feel Eddie's breath on his face. It was hot and heavy.

Richie's breaths shook, he was shaking.

Richie watched Eddie's eyes close, and he followed him. Their noses were now touching, and they could hear nothing other than the way their breaths came.

Their lips were about to brush together, but the loud sound of Eddie's phone ringing sent both of them flying off one another. Richie felt a lot colder like he was just woken up with a cold splash of water in his face from the best dream he's ever had and all he wanted was to go back to it.

Eddie had answered his phone and walked far enough from the bench Richie and him were just sitting on, so Richie couldn't hear him.

He wanted to fucking run. While Eddie has his back turned, he wanted to just go. They can't just laugh about this.

What happened was real. The waiter assuming they were dating was real too. Richie wasn't dreaming, but he thought that if he was, this was about to turn into a nightmare.

He heard Eddie shout something into the phone and then put it into his pocket. He put a hand on his face and stood there for a few seconds.

His hand fell back to his side, and he stared at the night sky.

Eddie turned back around, and their eyes met, Richie's breath hitched.

Richie's lips were still parted. His face was still hot and red.

Eddie's lips, however, were in a harsh line and he looked sad.

Richie could feel his heart breaking.

"Myra called. Paparazzi must've followed you because there are apparently photos of us shared on the internet from today."

Richie stood up and walked a bit closer to Eddie, "*Shit*, Do you think-"

"I really need to go, Rich. I don't know when you'll hear from me after this. I have..."

Eddie paused and took a shaky breath, "I have a lot of things to figure out. Myra's gonna kill me."

Richie placed his hand on Eddie's shoulder, but he shook it off, *fuck*.

"Eddie, please just-"

He had already started walking in the direction he had parked his car.

Eddie turned around to face Richie, "Thank you for today, Rich."

The smile on his face was sad. He looked as if he was about to cry. Richie could feel one of his own tears slip from his right eye.

"Goodbye, Rich." Eddie turned back around and started walking faster. Richie couldn't move, he felt like he was stuck in place.

It was like all sound around him was now muffled, he couldn't hear anything other than his trembling breaths.

"Goodbye?" Richie's voice cracked. He wished he could take it all back.

Nothing good ever happens when he tries to be himself. He should've known that by now.

And now he might've lost Eddie because of that.

Richie placed his face in his hands and started sobbing.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

ah, yes... the heavy angst is here... don't worry though!! it'll only be for like the next two or maybe just only the next chapter and then it's pure happiness and a lot of gay. i might write a bit of eddie's pov in the next chapter so you can see how things are at home. also i apologize for the ass

updating schedule. i'm trying to balance school, editing and writing all at once so it's a bit difficult. but considering i really want to finish this fic around christmas i'm going to try and update more! i hope you're all enjoying it so far.

## **6. Please Eddie, don't make me wait too long.**

Eddie should've known his drive back to New York wouldn't be quick. He arrived home at 2 AM when he said he would be home at around midnight. But that's not the first lie he has told today.

He walked up to his door and placed his hand on the doorknob and hesitated. He gripped it and shut his eyes, knowing that whatever happens inside won't be anything good.

Eddie took a deep breath and turned the handle, walking inside. He could see the lights were on in the living room.

He took his time taking off his jacket and boots, dreading to look at her or talk to her.

It feels like he's a kid again. Like those times, he hung out with the losers for too long and got home late.

He'd drive his bike as fast as he could to get home but only to get scolded and grounded.

Oh, how his mother would cry and scream at him that she can never know when he's safe or not.

The amount of guilt Eddie would feel after all that would be enough to crush him.

He suspects this is going to go pretty much the same way. Or maybe worse.

Eddie slowly walked into the living room and saw Myra sitting on the sofa with her face in her hands.

He leaned against the door frame and sighed, which seemed to catch her attention.

Her eyes were red from crying. Eddie swallowed the lump in his throat.

"What have I done wrong? What did I do to deserve to be lied to over

and over?" Her words were quiet, and she sounded tired, but each word felt like a cut on his skin.

"I care about you so much, don't you get that? Don't you get that all I've ever wanted is for you to be safe and protected?"

Eddie hung his head and shut his eyes. Myra took a shaky breath, "Who is the man you went to see today when you had said you were going to work?"

He was about to answer, but she only made it worse, "What's so special about him that you have to lie to me about seeing him? That you couldn't have just said told the truth?"

The words are on his tongue, but he can't do anything to get them out. He feels helpless. It feels like when you were little, and your mother asked you a question, but you were too afraid to answer to know what she would reply.

He felt like reaching for his inhaler, the one he has never even needed and was just manipulated into thinking he did.

"If he's a friend." Eddie's head shot up, and he shook it, "Myra, It's *nothing* like that, I swear. I'm not even-

He hesitated. *You're not what, Eddie? Don't you remember just from a few hours ago the thrill of Richie's finger on yours, the feeling of Richie's hot breath hitting your face?*

*Didn't you ache for more? Wanted more? What is it that you're not, Eddie?*

His eyes fell to the floor. He didn't want Myra to know about Richie. Dragging him more into this than he already is was un-needed. He wanted to protect Richie from her and her cruel words.

"He's my boss's-" Eddie flinched at the loud sound of her hand hitting the table.

"Stop lying!" Myra yelled. Eddie formed his lips into a straight line and leaned his head back against the wall.



"I'm so sick of this, Eddie! All I want is the best for you!"

She yelled more, and her voice cracked. She started crying. Eddie could feel the guilt rising in his stomach.

Eddie can't say he's been a good husband lately, or through all the years they've been together. But weirdly enough, he does care about her. He hates that he does, but it's the same way he felt towards his mother. She controlled him, and so does Myra. But Sonia also loved Eddie in her own way just like Myra, and that's what Eddie clung to.

His toxic relationship with his mother and the trauma from it felt like it was inescapable. Sonia deliberately weakened him to gain more control over Eddie's life. Myra does as well, and it's like she keeps a physical and psychological leash on Eddie, holding him back from everything he could handle all along.

"Honey, I *do* care." He whispered, his voice sounded hurt and broken.

Myra's turned to look at him so quickly, that Eddie felt a shiver run down his spine.

"But you care about that man *more*, don't you?"

Her words were like acid. Burning him severely with every small drop.

His mouth was agape. She can't know. *He* doesn't even know what he's feeling.

"That's not true." Eddie knew that if he thought about it a little longer, he'd see that it *is* true.

He'd see that Richie has been the only person in his life that never doubted how strong and brave he is.

Richie's never thought that Eddie needed protecting from anything. He's always believed in him.

"*I believe in you, man. Always have.*" Eddie's mouth tugged at a smile for a split second.

He was thrown back into reality seconds after.

"Just tell me who he is then!" She cried, and Eddie squeezed his eyes shut and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"He's my childhood best friend from Derry." Eddie replied, and she grimaced, "That's the same dirty town you came back from with that nasty scar."

*Nasty scar. Richie stood not far from Eddie, watching as Beverly patched up Eddie's stab wound. "Y'know-" Richie started and crossed his arms, squinting his eyes at Eddie's cheek, "I can just tell that'll look badass when it heals up, dude." Eddie rolled his eyes and chuckled, but then hissed in pain when Beverly pinched his arm and whispered, "Stop moving". Richie shrugged and smiled, "I'm serious, man! You took a stab to the face and survived. That's pretty cool if you ask me."*

She laughed lightly, "And you still haven't told me what entirely happened there or how you exactly got it."

Her face quickly turned back into a harsh frown, "If he's just some friend, why didn't you just tell me!?"

The anger in Eddie's stomach was boiling. He couldn't take it anymore.

"Because I knew that would've just made it worse!" He yelled, shocking her and even himself a little.

"Because I wanted to have something to myself for once! Something *good* that you wouldn't take away from me!"

Eddie groaned in anger and continued, "And I just *know* you would've told me that he's some snob that is no good." He was upset. He felt like he had wanted to say these things forever.

He chuckled and rolled his eyes, "Well, guess what? You don't need to protect me from every person I meet! You don't know him like I do! I'm already distant from my co-workers *because* of you!"

Myra's eyes were wide. Eddie could feel his eyes watering from how upset he was.

"I don't- I don't need you to tell me who I cannot trust and who I can! Who will protect me and who won't! I don't need that, Myra!"

She wiped her tears and stared at him, "But you do, Eddie." He ran his hand over his face and shook his head, "No one will love you or keep you safe like I do."

All he just said had been for nothing. Because she knows exactly how to pull his strings and bring him back into her arms. Just like his mother did.

"You don't need to lie to me anymore, Eddie." She stood up and slowly walked up to him.

Myra softly smiled at him, "I forgive you, Eddie. For everything. I forgive you because I know you're just confused and scared."

Eddie shook his head, Myra only nodded, "Yes, yes, you *are*, Eddie bear and It's alright."

She placed a hand on his cheek and rubbed away the tear falling from his eye, "I'm sorry I didn't think about that sooner and yelled at you like that earlier."

Myra pulled Eddie closer and kissed his cheek. "From now on we'll both be smarter, won't we?"

*"Yes, mommy," Eddie replied. Sonia smiled at him, and she wrapped her arms around him, holding him a bit too tight. She had found out he showered in the gym bathrooms with the other boys. Just like all the other kids in the school do after sports. It's not a big deal, but to Sonia it is. "Those boys at your school will get you sick. They probably want you to be sick like them. But you aren't, right, dear?" Eddie nodded and sniffled. "There, there, honey. I'll talk to your gym teacher this week. It's a shame how many dirty and gross people live in this town, Eddie."*

Eddie's eyes met Myra's, and he nodded. She smiled wider, "I love you, Eddie bear. I'm always here for you."

*"No matter what happens, you'll always have me," Richie replied, his face inching closer and closer to Eddie's.*

Eddie smiled lightly with tears stinging in his eyes.

"I love you too."

---

A week had passed since Eddie and Richie last spoke.

He wondered how long he'd have to wait to see Eddie again. *If* he was even gonna see him again.

Richie couldn't stop thinking about how many things could've gone differently.

He should've just given Eddie the advice and left it at that. What made him think it was a good idea to try and kiss him? To kiss his childhood best friend and crush who's now a married man?

Richie turned around in bed and groaned. He also can't stop thinking about what happened before everything went to shit.

How Eddie's pinkie finger held onto his and how small yet intimate that was.

How his heart was ready to jump out of his chest when he saw Eddie staring at his lips.

A part of Richie hopes that Eddie could feel the same way, but he doesn't want to be any more disappointed and sad than he is right now when he's only proved wrong.

These past few days Richie has only been getting out of bed to eat something and go to the bathroom. That's it.

His manager certainly isn't happy. But Richie just doesn't care about that right now. He doesn't really care much about anything right now.

Not to mention how pathetic he feels. He's a forty-year-old man that

still has feelings for his crush from since he was fucking twelve.

He should've found someone and just settled down with them. Eddie did, after all. Why can't he?

Richie pressed his face against his pillow and grumbled, "*Settle down*' Fucking idiot, you're not even out."

He jumped a little when his phone started ringing. This is probably the thousandth time someone's calling him this week. He glared at the phone but decided to at least look who it is and decide if today is the day he shows some attention to the outside world.

Richie rolled over and reached for his phone.

*Beverlyyyy is calling...*

Richie softly smiled but hesitated on the answer call button.

Maybe another day not talking to anybody and not doing anything wouldn't hurt, right?

He thought about that but then looked at Beverly's icon and sighed, "Alright, stop it, dickhead."

Richie picked up and rolled onto his back, pressing his phone against his ear.

He could hear Ben saying something in the background that he couldn't make out.

"He has to pick up one of these times, Ben!" Richie pushed his phone away from his hear that had been way too loud.

Richie heard a soft gasp on the line and then more mumbling he couldn't understand.

"Richie! Hey!" Beverly's voice echoed through the line, and he smiled.

"Hey, Bev." He replied. He was expecting Beverly to say something more but was only met with silence. "You still there?" He asked and laughed nervously.

"Yeah, I'm here. Just thinking about how much of an asshole you are." Beverly's voice sounded slightly hurt. Richie frowned, "Woah, what did I do?"

He could hear Beverly scoff, "I've been worried sick, Rich. We hadn't talked in a while, and you don't pick up the phone for *days* and expect me not to be worried?"

She took a shaky breath, "For all I know you could've been dead, Rich." She whispered. Richie wiped his eyes under his glasses, which he had forgotten to take off last night.

"Yeah, shit you're right. I'm sorry, Bev. I meant to call, but things got in the way, and then something happened, and I've felt like trash this whole week."

"You can tell me about that something, dummy. I'm your friend." Beverly's voice was so gentle and relaxing to listen to.

Beverly has always been kind and caring. Richie genuinely trusts her, even when he was a kid.

*Shit, I need to come out to her already.*

"Yeah, I think I'd like that but-" He sighed before continuing, "I just don't think I can do that on the phone. But you're a busy woman, so I don't expect-"

"I *am* busy today, but I *can* get a ticket to New Jersey tomorrow morning."

Richie couldn't tell if she was serious or not. "You're joking?" He asked and sat up in bed.

"Nope, Ben and I were actually considering checking on you in person earlier today."

Richie huffed and smiled lightly, "You're serious?"

"Believe it or not but there are people in your life that care about you, Richie." She paused, "And I haven't heard a good joke in a while, so I need that."

They both laughed, and when they calmed down a little bit, Richie's grin stayed on his face, "I missed you, Bev."

"I missed you too, Richie." He could tell she was smiling by the way she said that and that made him smile more.

"Oh, by the way!" Richie could hear the click of her heels. He figured that she was walking to a different room.

"I want to surprise Ben with Christmas decorations, but I don't have them yet. So I was thinking we could go shopping together? Just hang out and get some stuff to get into the Christmas spirit."

Richie ran a hand through his hair and closed his eyes, *I don't deserve her, do I?*

"That sounds fucking great," Richie said and looked around his apartment. Maybe a few Christmas decorations could brighten up the place. Literally.

He could hear Beverly let out a happy little squeal which made him chuckle. "Yes! That's great news!"

She cleared her throat and started speaking normally again, "Richie, I'm glad you're okay."

He finally unraveled himself from his covers and stood on the half warm and half cold floor. *Oh*, he's missing one sock.

Richie walked up to his window and watched the snowflakes fall and then lightly smiled, "Yeah, me too. Life sucks, but I guess It's not *all* bad. Sometimes."

Beverly giggled, "Exactly. Before Mike called me-" She paused, "My life was good, but my marriage was a disaster. So that made my life pretty bad as well. Now, however, I'm a lot better. You'll be too, Rich."

"I hope so. Also, I'm really happy for you, Bev." Richie said and walked over to his fridge to open and look through it. "Thanks, Richie. Take care of yourself because you haven't for a week. Go take a shower, eat some food and rest up because *we* got a long day ahead

of us tomorrow."

"Can't wait to sit in the mall's Santa's lap and tell him all the things I want for Christmas," Richie said as he decided to just eat some frosted flakes for breakfast or well, he looked at the clock, lunch.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, you're probably on the naughty list." Beverly giggled, and Richie gasped to act hurt and then laughed. He heard Beverley say something to probably Ben in the background.

"I need to go, Rich. I'll text you everything tonight, and I'll see you tomorrow, alright?"

"Have fun with whatever you're about to do. See you. Also, tell Ben to send me his workout routine!"

He could hear Beverly chuckle before she hung up and Richie placed his phone on the counter that he was leaning against. Richie's not going to work out. He just wanted to remind Beverly that her fiancé is way too attractive. Richie let out a short laugh at that thought and began digging into his cereal.

---

Richie and Beverly agreed that they'd meet at the entrance of the mall. It took Richie a few seconds to recognize Beverly considering he had woken up not long ago, and It's been a while since he's woken up at 8 AM willingly. When he realized the woman with short red hair was her, he wasted no time running towards her and wrapping her in a hug.

"What the-Oh!" Beverly erupted in laughter and clung onto Richie as he lifted her off the ground and swung her around. He placed her back on the ground carefully and then earned a light punch at his chest,

"Ow! Good to see you too!" Richie said and lightly rubbed at the spot Beverly had hit him to ease the non-existent pain. Maybe he's a bit too dramatic.



"You don't just grab people out of nowhere, Richie. That could've been anyone, and I was ready to punch you!"

Richie chuckled and shrugged, "Yeah, good point."

Beverly looked as beautiful as ever. Her hair had gotten a bit longer since he had last seen her.

"Middle age suits you." That made Beverly laugh, Richie flashed a wide smile. "No, I'm serious! Like what the fuck? You look about twenty!"

Beverly rolled her eyes, but her smile stayed, "Oh, shut up, why don't we just get to it? I was thinking lights first."

Richie looked at the mall's entrance and then squinted his eyes at Beverly. He reached out his hand, politely, "Shall we?"

Beverly put his hand back down and began walking, "You're embarrassing."

"You love it!" He shouted and jogged after her.

They had walked around for quite some time now. The mall was filled entirely with Christmas related things even though it was only early December. Richie poked Beverly's shoulder to get her attention, "By the way, did you see the homeless Santa near the corner of the mall?" Beverly looked at him and let out a short laugh, "Was there actually?"

"Yeah, the north pole must suck if he's come here," Richie said while grinning, Beverly simply dismissed him. She stopped at a small store and turned to look at Richie,

"Have you eaten yet?" She asked. Richie scratched the back of his neck and whispered, "Nooooo...".

Beverly frowned and tugged at his arm, pulling him towards the store. "That's not good for you." She muttered and was already grabbing at one of those ready-to-go sandwiches.

"I was planning to eat breakfast I just took too long to get ready and

had to run."

Beverly sighed and shook her head, "How are you surviving on your own? Also, do you like ham and cheese?"

Richie nodded, "Yeah, give me that. And I'm not entirely sure, honestly." She fiercely put the sandwich in his hand and glanced backward.

"I'm going to go get some coffee for the both of us. Pay for your breakfast and meet me on the nearest bench." Richie smiled at her and then grabbed another sandwich from the shelf.

He munched at the ham and cheese sandwich as he patiently waited for Beverly to re-appear. The bench he was sitting on was very close to a TV that had an animated Christmas tree dancing on it. It was very distracting.

Richie wondered if this was a good time to *talk* talk. It's never gonna be a good time anyway, so why not? It's only Richie's ultimate fear of being rejected that's getting in the way.

After this, there's no going back. He could say it was just a joke if it goes wrong, but who jokes about stuff like this? This'll be the first time in his life where he's not lying about who he is. And that's terrifying. Before Mike called to get him back to Derry, he had pretty much almost convinced himself he was straight. Even Richie's little experience with men made him feel pathetic.

That little experience includes blatant flirting in bars he's been to that lead to nothing, having sex with a guy on his last day of college and two one night stands he has encountered after having been asked for a drink after one of his shows. That so-called experience only filled him with more shame and regret.

Richie flashed a smile when he saw Beverly carefully walking with their cups of coffee. "Why, thank you," Richie said and grabbed his cup that Beverly was handing him. She sat down next to him and sipped her coffee. Richie's leg was bouncing up and down, and he was tapping the lid of the cup.

"Everything alright?" She asked, and Richie stopped. *Here we go, I guess.* He placed the coffee down and took a deep breath, "There's something I have to tell you".

Beverly's face expression flashed with worry, "Is it something bad?"

Richie chuckled, "Depends on how you see it." Beverly's face didn't change.

"It's not anything bad." Richie clarified, and Beverly instantly relaxed. "Well, talk to me then. I'm here for you." Beverly's words only made him more nervous. Richie rubbed his nose and sighed.

Is it better to drag it out or just say it? How do people do this? Fuck it.

"I'm gay." Richie's voice was quiet; he sounded afraid. Which he definitely was.

The silence made his stomach twist. Beverly hadn't said anything yet.

She hadn't stood up and bolted either, so that's a good sign.

Richie bit his lip and finally turned to look at Beverly. She had a slight grin on her face.

He blinked, and he was already pulled into her arms. His hands froze for a few seconds before they wrapped around her tightly.

He rested his face on her shoulder as she rubbed his back.

"Thank you so much for trusting me and telling me that," Beverly whispered calmly, "I love you, Richie."

It was overwhelming. The relief and joy he was feeling right now could tear the world in half. It felt like a huge weight was lifted off of his shoulder, and he could finally breathe.

Richie's eyes started to water. He let out a laugh that later turned into a sob.

He pushed his face into Beverly's shoulder, holding onto her tighter.

Richie's body shook in her arms as he cried.

He felt safe and accepted for the first time in his life. He could finally feel like himself.

It felt like thirty minutes had passed when Richie finally pulled back.

He took off his glasses and wiped at his eyes, "Shit, sorry. I just wasn't expecting this." He whispered and chuckled lightly.

Beverly put her hand on his shoulder and squeezed, "Don't be sorry for a single second. I'm so proud of you."

Richie smiled at her, tears threatening to slip from his eyes again. He let out a long sigh and looked at the ceiling,

"I didn't expect it to feel this fucking good either, holy shit." Beverly giggled and brushed a strand of hair behind his ear.

"This is unreal. I like dick, and somebody knows about it." Richie beamed at Beverly. She continued to giggle.

This reminded him of when they'd go smoke together after school. Share a cigarette and talk about how their days went and what pissed them off. They never judged each other no matter how big or small the issue was they were dealing with. It made them both feel at ease, to have someone you can trust.

"I know this wasn't easy for you. I admire your courage." Beverly said and handed him his cup of coffee. It had gotten a bit cold now. Richie still had a smile on his face, he felt free, and he couldn't get enough of it. Even if only one person knew, it felt close to euphoric.

"Thank you, Bev. I can't begin to explain how grateful I am for you." Richie didn't want to start crying again, he knows he's sensitive but *shit* it feels like he's on the verge of tears every twenty seconds, so he took his cup and lifted it up, "Here's to me, the middle-aged comedian finally coming out." Beverly smirked softly and lifted her cup as well, "Here's to you. The best middle-aged comedian I know."

Because the cups aren't made out of material that's supposed to be cheered with, Richie made sure to whisper "*clink*" when their cups hit

each other.

After that whole scene, they continued to walk through the mall. About two hours precisely until Richie was groaning about how his legs might fall off and Beverly will have to carry him. Richie didn't buy much of the decorations. Instead, he purchased five ugly Christmas sweaters, a mug that said *"Jolliest asshole on this side of the nuthouse"* which he spent about five minutes laughing at while Beverly complained that It's not funny at all, and a pair of reindeer slippers.

Beverly, however, was carrying two bags full of Christmas decorations, not counting the third one Richie offered to help carry. Beverly had bought a reindeer antler headband, which Richie managed to put on her at the checkout. She still hasn't noticed.

"So is that all?" Beverly asked and put the bags on the ground to stretch. Richie yawned and shrugged, "I fucking hope so. I haven't walked this much since Derry."

Beverly checked the time on her phone and whispered, *"Shit."*

Richie raised an eyebrow and waved his hands near her face to get her to look at him, "What's up?" He asked, a bit worried.

"I still have three hours until I have to get going back to the airport. What am I supposed to do?"

Richie's face expression fell into a blank stare. Beverly was the one confused now, "What's that look for?"

"I don't have shit to do today, Bev. You-" He poked her nose, "And I are gonna get fucking drunk. That's what *we'll* do until then."

Beverly grabbed her bags from the floor and smiled at Richie, "Let's get to it then."

---

A few shots in and Richie and Beverly were howling with laughter at the bar table.

"Oh, my sweet Beverly!" Richie wiped at his eyes under his glasses, almost crying out of pure laughter.

Beverly raised her hands in annoyance, "What is updog?! I don't know what it is! Let alone what it smells like-*Oh*."

Richie slammed his hand on the bar table and pressed his forehead against it, laughing uncontrollably.

"Richie that's-" Beverly snorted, "That's genius but so bad!"

Richie lifted his head back, pointed at Beverly and laughed harder. Beverly took off Richie's glasses and put them on herself. She pointed at Richie and started laughing harder, mocking him.

Richie blinked a few times and chuckled, "If you're making fun of me you should know I'm blind as shit and can't actually see what you're doing."

Beverly's laughter stopped, and she pouted, "Damn it." She took them off and put them back on Richie. He gasped and cupped his face, "Wow! My saviour! I can see again!"

Richie clung onto Beverly like a little kid and, she started laughing again. Richie *loves* how easy it is to make Beverly laugh. He let go of her and leaned back in his chair.

His mind suddenly went to Eddie, and how only a few weeks ago they had spent hours laughing together in a bar as well. Eddie's hand gripping Richie's shoulder when he'd find himself laughing so hard he had to hold onto *something*. He remembers the light smile that would stay on Eddie's face after laughing. *Fuck*, he's gorgeous, isn't he?

"Richie, you alright?" Beverly asked and rested her face in her hands. Richie looked at her with a frown and shook his head. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. He was laughing only a few seconds ago for fuck's sake. Instead of answering that he asked her a question instead,

"Have you seen the photos of Eddie and me? The ones at the aquarium?"

The photos *definitely* gave off the wrong impression. They were standing a bit too close to each other in some and Richie had his arm slung over Eddie's shoulders in half of them. Shit, he hopes Eddie's wife didn't fuck with him because of those.

Beverly nodded, "Oh, yeah. You two looked happy."

Richie smiled before it fell back into a frown, "Yeah, we were." He sighed deeply, "So to basically sum it up I've had a crush on him since forever."

He looked at her, expecting at least some sort of shock but her facial expression didn't change. Richie squinted his eyes, "Why are you not like *'Woah, seriously?'* right now?"

Beverly smiled, "You two weren't exactly subtle when we were kids, y'know." Richie scoffed and smirked softly. "And you'd always talk about how much Eddie annoyed you when he did that, said this and stuff like that." Richie scratched his stubble. He noticed Beverly made some good points.

"So, you pretty much knew?" He asked, and she shrugged,

"I suspected." Beverly replied, "But even those few months back..."

She took a deep breath and smiled softly, "I saw the way he looked at you. Like he was just waiting for you to crack another joke he'd hate."

A small smile tugged at Richie's lips. Beverly's smile fell after a few seconds, "Why did you bring him up, though?"

Richie rubbed the back of his neck, "Because we've been seeing each other lately." Beverly's mouth fell open, Richie continued before she could say anything, "*Not* In that way. He's still married. We don't even text each other or call. It's like we're both living in the damn stone ages."

Beverly's eyebrows furrowed, "Why don't *you* text or call him first? And how do you two meet then?"

"Because I'm a fucking disaster!" Richie exclaimed, "And hell, what if we *did* call or text and his wife went through his phone and saw me? I know I'd send him dumb shit she'd find suspicious and he'd be screwed." Richie took a second to take a breath, "And he shows up at my house or my comedy shows. Easy enough, he knows where to find me."

Beverly sighed and took another shot, "What happened between you two then?"

Richie motioned at the bartender for four more shots, those three being for him and then looked back at Beverly, "After the aquarium, we hung out more and things escalated and I-"

Richie rubbed a hand over his face, "I tried to kiss him." He muttered. Richie saw Beverly's eyes widen through the gaps of his fingers.

"Oh, shit. And?" She asked impatiently.

"Well, his sweet, loving wife called right when it was about to happen. I thought that shit only happened in movies!" He groaned and took a short, grimacing for a second at the taste.

Beverly held up her hand, "So let me get this? He was leaning in too?"

Richie nodded, "Yeah."

"He's married to a woman? Yet he was going in for the kiss as well?"

"Yes, did you forget? And yes, Beverly where is this-"

"And you think he doesn't like you back?"

Richie rolled his eyes, "Thanks for rubbing it in."

He winced in pain when he felt Beverly slap the back of his head. "What the fuck?" He hissed in pain and glanced at her.

"I sure hope that knocked some sense into you," Beverly replied and took the shot Richie ordered her.



Richie stared at her blankly. Beverly pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Richie, I love you, alright? You're my best friend but *come on*."

Beverly cupped Richie's face, "Why would he lean in to kiss you if he didn't like you?" She shook him. Seconds later, Richie's eyes widened, and he pulled away, covering his mouth with his hand.

"He likes you, Richie. He's just in a tough situation."

"Shit," Richie muttered.

Richie put both of his hands on his head and let out a weak laugh, "What the hell do I do now?"

Beverly passed Richie his shot, "Get in contact with him. It's not easy for him either, Richie. Most importantly be patient."

Richie chuckled, "I've been patient for twenty-seven years, Bev."

"So was Ben." She said calmly. Richie looked at her, and she had that stupid *in-love* smile on her face. Richie looked at the empty shot glass and sighed deeply, "I don't think I can be *that* brave, Bev."

Richie whispered, and Beverly put her hand in his and squeezed reassuringly, "That's alright. I think both of you would rather walk through Neibolt again than say anything remotely serious to each other." That made him chuckle weakly. Richie's mind was spiralling.

He looked at Beverly with sad eyes, "But you don't *know* If he feels the same way. Not for sure."

Beverly nodded, "You're right, I don't. But from what you've told me It's sure pointing that way."

Richie wanted to believe that so badly, but the doubts crossing his mind made that hope quickly falter.

What if Eddie's just confused and experimenting? Would Eddie even do that? What if Eddie's just curious and is using Richie as some sort of *gay test*? Jesus Christ.

Beverly noticed how sad Richie looked and squeezed his hand again, "It'll be okay, Rich."

Richie nodded the tiniest bit and whispered "I hope so."

They sat like that for a little while. Richie's usually a very happy drunk, not a sad one. Beverly didn't like seeing him like this. Richie's never the one to be sad, he's always smiling and cracking jokes, so it was only even more heartbreaking to be this sad.

She looked at the clock and frowned. It was probably best for her to get going, but leaving Richie like this is the last thing he needs, and she wants.

"Richie?"

"Yeah?"

"Why does it smell like up dog in here?"

Richie's facial expression turned into a cocky smile, "What's up dog?"

They both laughed, and Beverly pulled him up to his feet. "I need to get going, Rich."

Good thing Richie drove his car back home before they headed to this bar because if he tried to drive them anywhere right now, they'd probably end up in a ditch.

"I'll get us an uber." He said and reached for his wallet to pay the bartender.

"Don't forget about your Christmas decorations." Richie reminded Beverly, and she walked over to the chairs they were just sitting on and reached under them, pulling out their bags.

They waited outside for the uber to arrive and Richie noticed Beverly was shivering. Like the gentleman he is, he took off his jacket and put it around her shoulders.

Beverly smiled at him and stepped closer to him. Richie put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her into a side hug.

"I'm glad you picked up," Beverly muttered and stared at the stars in the sky. Richie rubbed her arm up and down and smiled softly, "Yeah, me too."

Richie glanced at the lights in Beverly's bags, "You better send me photos of when you're done decorating the house. I bet It'll look the best in the neighbourhood."

Beverly smiled wider, "I will, and you better keep in touch."

"I promise." He replied and kissed the top of Beverly's head.

"You know, if I were straight Ben would've definitely had to watch out." Beverly threw her head back as she burst out laughing. Richie laughed quietly too and continued, "Just saying! He doesn't know how lucky he is!"

Richie's laughter quieted down when he noticed the car that had been sent as their uber.

Richie opened up the door for her and then climbed in as well.

The drive to the airport was quiet, he was almost convinced Beverly had fallen asleep on his shoulder, but she'd occasionally snuggle up closer to Richie and flash him a smile. He'd greet her with one as well.

*God fucking damn it.* Richie cursed mentally as his thoughts had managed to drift back to Eddie.

Richie wondered what Eddie was doing right now.

He wondered how Eddie's week had passed.

He wondered if Eddie ever thought of him.

He wondered if Eddie wanted him as much as Richie wanted him.

"Hey, Rich?" Beverly poked his shoulder, making him snap out of those thoughts. "Yeah?" He asked and looked around. They were already at the airport.

Beverly placed Richie's jacket in his lap and shuffled further to open the car door.

Before stepping out, she leaned in and kissed Richie's cheek.

"Take care of yourself, Richie."

"Have a safe flight." He replied.

She shut the car door and stepped back, waving him goodbye. Richie watched as she walked off into the pools of people coming in and out of the airport as well.

The uber driver started the car and asked, "So, where are you off to?"

Richie shifted in his seat and sighed, thinking it over, even though he didn't have much to think about. He had already made up his mind.

"I'm heading to New York."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

wow so this turned out a lot longer than i thought it'd be! i've been writing this chapter for about 5 hours straight now and this is the most i've ever written in that amount of time. hopefully, you enjoyed reading this chapter! thank you again for all the sweet comments and the people that have been reading this and following it since chapter 1 i really appreciate it. i'll try to get out the next chapter soon. things will finally start picking up between richie and eddie ;)